

UPE Public Debate

In its attempt to improve the quality of education (UPE) through promoting transparency and accountability; John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre together with its partners in the dioceses of Soroti, Lira, Gulu and Moroto organized a *Public debate on the 13th of February 2015*. The overall objective of the dialogue was to present a platform where various stakeholders can share ideas, views and experiences on how best to enhance transparency and accountability in the area of education (UPE). At the dialogue JPIIJC shared a report of its findings on the status of UPE through monitoring that was conducted by community monitors from the north and north eastern Uganda. Their after a *Public debate* ensued reflecting on the current proceedings in the education sector. The meeting was attended by the former Assistant Bishop of Kampala All saints cathedral Rt.Reverand, Dr David Zac Niringiye who gave a key note speech on the status of UPE in Uganda today. He credited the government for providing UPE to all school going children but regretted that if nothing is done, many children attending UPE schools will have a big gap with their counterparts in private schools elsewhere. He therefore proposed compulsory feeding to all school going children as one of the key recommendations for government to take seriously and improve performance in UPE schools.



On his part, the Assistant Commissioner for Primary Education Dr. Lusambu acknowledged that its true UPE faces many challenges since its inception and this is the more reason why all stakeholders including parents, NGOs, development partners, government, and policy makers should consider working in collaboration to enhance quality education. More important to note also was the sharing from the Executive director of Coalition of Private School Teachers Association (COUPSTA) Patrick Kaboyo. He stressed that citizens of Uganda should work towards eliminating corrupt and irresponsible leaders as their representatives in the Parliament of Uganda because they are easily manipulated for selfish interests and once that is done a lot will be achieved in the area of service delivery including education-UPE.

Rationale

The Public debate has its background from a monitoring exercise on the status of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 120 schools. The survey was conducted in the **Acholi sub-region:** Gulu, Amuru and Agago districts; the **Lango sub-region:** Lira, Kole, Otuke, Oyam, Dokolo and Alebtong districts; the **Teso sub-region:** Soroti, Katakwi, Ngora, Kumi, Amuria, Kaberamaido and Serere districts; and the **Karamoja sub-region:** Moroto, Napak, Nakapiripirit and Amudat districts.

It's quite well known in Uganda that the introduction of UPE policy in 1997 by the government of Uganda was intended to increase access, equity, and quality of primary education with the view also to eradicate illiteracy and subsequently transform society. It's in this premise that JPIIIPC embarked on a monitoring exercise to identify the challenges in the provision of quality UPE for all children and secondly to assess the extent to which the government program of PRDP is addressing the challenges faced in the UPE schools in the region of North and North Eastern Uganda. Thus, in order to provide comprehensive data on the key emerging issues in the area of education (UPE) a total of 110 Justice and Peace Committee members were trained as community monitors to monitor (UPE) and the implementation of the PRDP in the North and North Eastern Uganda.

The findings have revealed that the implementation of the program leaves a lot to be desired. Some of these issues and concerns are attributed to inadequate efforts of the stakeholders in fulfilling their obligations, coupled with poor accountability and transparency in the management of government resources. Others emanate from limited political will, negative attitude and negligence. That said, one can't deny that the education of our children today is a vital part of our future, recent media reports about education in Uganda indicate the need for a holistic approach to change the existing statusquo. It's therefore out of this background that JPIIIPC has organized a public dialogue for various stakeholders to raise awareness about the issues affecting the improvement of UPE and what recommendations can be put across to government, NGOs, development partners, parents to improve the status of Universal Primary Education (UPE).