

Uganda: Early childhood education is a right ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Since all children are rights bearers, they have a right to education and parents should ensure to deliver this right.

Research made by UNICEF quotes the African Charter, which states that the family should be accorded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community, one of which is the growth and well-being of children.

Article 5 indicates the imperative to respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents and the extended family or community as provided for by local custom and legal guardians to provide, appropriate direction and guidance while promoting child rights as recognised in the present Convention.

Article 18 affirms that parents or legal guardians have the primary responsibility for promoting children's development and well-being. The article specifies that both parents have a common responsibility in this regard. It notes that States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children. Children of working parents have the right to benefit from child care services and facilities for which they are eligible.

The right to health in Article 24 also reflects the need for appropriate measures to ensure that all segments of society, in particular parents and children, are informed and supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding, hygiene and environmental sanitation and the prevention of domestic and other accidents.

Effective and appropriate measures should be taken with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children. Article 27 concerns the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

The article indicates that States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, should take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for children, to implement this right. In case of need, material assistance and support programmes should be provided, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

Article 25 urges member countries to pay attention to children; put in different placements for purposes of their care, protection, and treatment of their health. Countries are required to come up with regulations to safeguard and govern this right.

Article 29 talks about the need to respect a child's cultural identity, language, and values and preparation of the child for a responsible life. Basically this article points out the need to help the child to acquire appropriate life skills and foundations for learning and later life.

The Charter on the rights and welfare addresses issues relating to the role of parents or the family in respect of the welfare of the child.

Article 9 relates to the parents' or the guardians' role in respect of guidance and direction in the exercise of these rights regarding freedom of thought, conscience and religion. It also emphasises free participation in play, rest, leisure and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child.

Parental responsibilities should be carried out in the best interests of the child, including development, discipline, material assistance, care services and facilities while parents are at work. There is an undertaking to give parents material assistance and support programmes, including child rearing, nutrition, health, education, clothing and housing, and to assist parents and others responsible for the child in the performance of child rearing.

International commitments

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is both a right and a major contributor to development and poverty reduction. International commitment to early childhood is growing and has been underlined by a number of frameworks and conventions to which Uganda adheres. These include:

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, which focuses on guaranteeing the rights of young children to survive, develop and be protected.

The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All which states that learning begins at birth and encourages the implementation of ECD.

The World Education Forum, Dakar 2000, which reaffirmed the importance of ECD in reaching basic education goals.

The UN Special Session on Children, 2002.

The Dakar Framework for Action adopted by the World Education Forum, which commits signatory nations - of which Uganda is one - to attain the goals pertaining to the child with emphasis on expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) ratified in 1981, has several provisions which apply to the state's role in respect of ECD. For example, in Article 5 it advocates family education which includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children.

The Millennium Development Goals do not make explicit mention of the family though their achievement requires that interventions target families and communities in their strategies to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, reduce child mortality, combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and achieve Universal Primary Education.

The Education for All (EFA) goal of "Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children," has particular implications for extending interventions to those children not catered for in institutional programmes.

Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills" can be seen as requiring family and community participation.

- reprinted from *All Africa*

Region: International ^[2]

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