

# *Hope amidst Obstacles:*

## *The State of Nursery Education in Uganda*

*The Neglected Critical First Step in Broader Development*





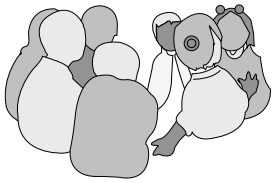
# *Hope amidst Obstacles:* The State of Nursery Education in Uganda

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The Neglected Critical First Step in Broader Development

A study carried out by

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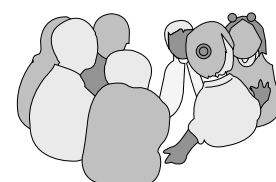
## Acknowledgements

Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN) secretariat would like to record appreciation to all those invaluable contributions made the analysis of the state of Nursery education in Uganda possible. First and foremost to all the head teachers, teachers and proprietors, Inspectors of schools and the pupils in all the districts where the survey was carried out, for enduring the intriguing questions and inconvenience caused by our research team.

Further appreciation goes to our member organizations particularly those in the ECD Thematic group, whose initiatives inspired undertaking this analysis and gave immense support to the process.

Special thanks go to UCRNN Secretariat staff members whose dedication and hard work made the writing of this report a success.

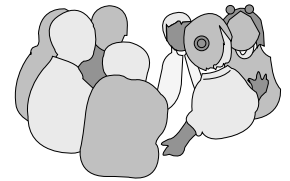
Most of all we thank and appreciate the financial support given by Common Wealth Education Fund (CEF) whose support facilitated the production of this report.



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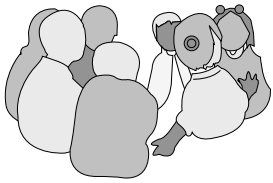
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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

CCT	Centre for Co-ordinating Tutors
CRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DIS	District Inspectors of Schools
DDHS	District Director of Health Services
DEO	District Education Officer
DPOs	District Probation Officers
DPSWO	District Probation and Social welfare Officer
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECDE	Early Childhood Development and Education
EFA	Education for All
ESA	Education Standard Agency
ESR	Education Sector Review
FDG	Focus Group Discussions
MDGs	Mellium Development Goals
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NGO	Non Governmental Organisations
OVCs	Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children
PEAP	Poverty Eradication Action Plan
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UPPET	Universal Post primary Education and Training
YMCA	Young Men Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women Christian Association



## Foreword

Every child is born with rights and these have been streamlined in various national and international conventions. Among those set in the Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) are; the right to an education, right to health and proper healthcare, the right to name and nationality, a right to be protected from harm and the right to participate in matters that affect them the right to be treated equally among others.

Education is critical to child's development and well-being and is equally important for social stability and economic development of any country. Learning begins at birth and continues through adolescence. Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) therefore provide a strong foundation for the relentless pursuit of this life long process. Parents, caregivers and other community members play a vital stimulating role. Research has proved that the level of care and stimulation a child receives determines the holistic development and learning of that child.

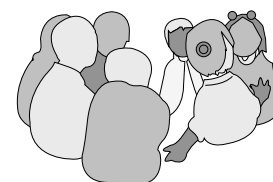
There is international recognition of the critical importance for protecting the rights of young children to develop their full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potential. This is expressed a number of international declarations and frameworks like the CRC, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA) goal and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), all of which have provisions for inclusion of ECD as a priority area.

Despite adoption of such declarations and frameworks, Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Uganda has not received the necessary support in concrete terms. It ranked low among government priority areas and as such it has not attracted sufficient resource allocation. Programmes aimed at promoting ECD are largely developed by the private sector and NGOs. They henceforth suffer inadequate funding, lacks coherence, sustainability and a long term articulate policy guideline.

Formal learning opportunities for children below the age of six remains limited with vast majority of children between 3-5 years not having access to any form of Pre-primary school. Pre-primary education is characterized by lack of policy guidelines as attested by the existence of Boarding Nursery schools. The perception of the concept of ECDE needs to be revitalized and strengthened and the policy on ECD passed to guide the practitioners

UCRNN's conviction is that this survey report will reawaken efforts for supporting the promotion Early Childhood learning and Development. We are pleased to make this survey report available and hope it will be a used as guide for strengthening ECDE in the country.

**Stella Ayo- Odongo**  
**National Programme Coordinator**  
**Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN)**



## 1.0 Introduction and Background

### 1.1 Introduction

Nursery schools have gained prominence in the recent past as facilities to offer daily adult supervision and care for young children in the absence of their mothers or the caregivers, engaged in equally competing livelihood related activities. Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) is thus critical for the growth and development of a child. There is a positive link between early childhood learning and future holistic development of a child which however has not been clearly understood either at family and community or at policy levels. There are about 795 registered pre-primary schools in the country with approximately 59,829 children (MoES, 2001) mainly in the urban because the demand for pre-primary education is still low in rural areas. This figure is dismal given the fact that children between 0 - 6 years constitutes 20% of Uganda's population and of these 75% live in rural areas and are deprived of basic care.

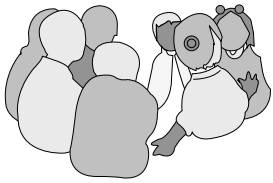
### 1.2 Background to the Study

The survey was conducted with the purpose of establishing the policy framework in place to facilitate the observance and realization of children's right to education with particular emphasis on the Early Childhood development and Education (ECDE). A rapid assesment was carried out in four districts of Kampala, Wakiso, Mpigi and Mukono. It was commissioned by Uganda Child rights NGO Network to inform the establishment of framework to guide ECDE.

The value of education in the development of any society is immutable and thus should be enjoyed by all children from pre-school age through adolescence as a vehicle of social transformation. Early Childhood period (0 - 8 years) is very critical not only in the physical but also in the development of psychosocial and cognitive abilities of the child. It has been confirmed by research in various fields ranging from neurobiology to psychology that a child's physical and cognitive development is shaped by the experiences undergone during the first years of life.

Early Childhood Development and learning period requires proper nutrition, health, care and stimulation of a child's abilities. Particular attention during this period is important because childhood is one window of opportunity for child's better start in life. Pre-primary education in this context nursery education is thus very useful in stimulating and shaping a child's personality in an environment that fortifies them against abuse and fulfills their best interest.

The apparent competition between child care and other livelihood priorities requires coordinated and guided early childhood learning since many parents have relinquished child protection and care to nursery school and care takers.



Despite its importance, ECDE has attracted low priority in government policies. ECDE programmes have been left to the private sector, NGOs and parents groups, suffers inadequate funding, lack of sustainability and long-term policy guidelines. This is back peddling to Early Childhood Development and Education. Lack of a comprehensive ECDE policy renders parents vulnerable to exploitation and wantony abuse of child rights as portrayed in the emergence of boarding nursery schools. This report presents the state of Nursery education in the country based on a rapid assesment in the selected districts and makes recommendations for promotion of ECDE in Uganda.

## 1.3 Methodology

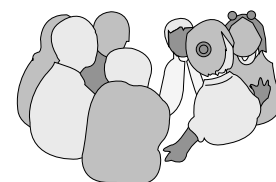
A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used. It started with the review of available literature on Early Childhood Development and Education. Additionally, international, regional and national legislations and Policy instruments were also reviewed. Key informant interviews were conducted in the districts of Kampala, Wakiso, Mpigi and Mukono, which have got fair representation of Nursery and Pre-primary schools. Interviews targeted Head teachers and teachers of different Nursery schools, District inspectors of Schools, District Education Officers and other officials responsible for education and Early Childhood in each of the selected District. The interviews also targeted some NGOs, CSOs in provision of education services

The assesment was carried out in 99 Nursery schools randomly selected. Of these 27 in Kampala, 18 in Mukono, 22 in Wakiso and 22 in Mpigi district selected according to the available number of Nursery schools in the district.

The tools used for data collection included; questionnaires and interviews guides for collection of data from the Head teachers, teachers and Directors. Key informant interviews were also conducted with District Education Officers (DEOs), District Inspectors of Schools (DIS) and the District Probation Officers (DPOs).

## 1.4 Challenges of the Study

The study use specific cases emerging from the rapid assesment to describe the state of nursery education. Resource constraints and limitation of the practice on nursery school especially in the Rural districts made it difficult to undertake a countrywide survey and use of a comprehensive quantitative analysis. However the findings were backed up by National Consulations with various stakeholders as a way of cross checking and establishing the authenticity of the findings. This analysis therefore indicates the onground state of nursery education.

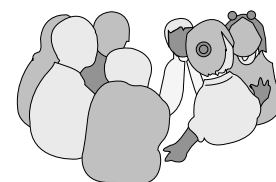


## 2.0 Policy Framework

Establishment of nursery schools in Uganda is largely a responsibility of the private sector. However the Ministry of Education is responsible for setting up guidelines for the operation of Nursery Schools including the registration, licensing of Schools and coordinating the monitoring of the education sector. It is also responsible for the development, production and distribution of instructional materials, and setting guidelines for operation of the Schools. In 1989, the Education Review Commission came up with wide ranging recommendations for improvement of the entire education sector and recognized Early Childhood Education as a key area for intervention. Although the recommendations of this Commission were adopted in the Education White Paper way back in 1992, there is no Policy in place on Pre-primary education. The draft Early Childhood Development Policy developed by the Ministry of Education is yet to be adopted by the Government.

In the face of marginal Government involvement in Nursery education, the Private entrepreneurs dominate the sector. Most Nursery teacher training colleges are privately owned with the exception of Kyambogo University, which offers training at different levels. As a result of this, the Ministry of Education does not have full control and information on over pre-primary Schools in Uganda. Service provision therefore, deviates substantially from acceptable norms and practices. The Ministry recognizes the importance of ECDE but the effort to promote it is not commensurate to the need especially as far as policy formulation and development is concerned.





## 3.0 Findings Of The Study

In a rapid assesment carried out the following were dicovered

### 3.1 Ownership and Management of Nursery Schools

It was established that the provision of Nursery education services is a preserve of private entrepreneurs, Communities, and Parents. The review of literature indicated that out of the 9000 Pre-primary schools in Uganda, only 17 are owned by government<sup>1</sup>. It is a paradox that a country considered a success in implementing programmes aimed at educating all it's children can ignore the foundation stage which is not only critical in stimulating learning but the entire development process of a child. It is also a contradiction with the country's commitment to educating all its children spelt out in the CRC, the Cairo Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and Education for All (EFA) goals all of which places emphasis on early childhood learning that is, it is the first of six in the series devoted to meeting the Education for All goals the world is committed to achieving by 2015.

This laxity is translated into minimal formal early learning opportunities for children below the age of six years. This is worse in rural areas where vast majority of children live. Consequently, most children between the age of 3–6 years do not attend any form of pre-primary education<sup>2</sup> which denies them a chance of progressively exercising their right to quality early learning and preparation to timely enrollment into primary schools. This also pause a threat to their future holistic development.

### 3.2 Quality of Education

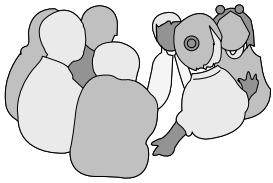
The standard of education in most of the schools assessed left a lot to be desired. This was compounded by the poor learning environment, poor hygiene and the quality of playing kits. Access to education is as important as what is learnt in schools especially at a level of stimulating learning and community development. The situation was worse in rural schools compared to the urban.

### 3.3 Curriculum

The survey revealed lack of a unified curriculum followed by all the Nursery schools in the country. Despite the presence of a learning framework which was developed by the National Curriculum Development Center, many schools do not subscribe to it. They have developed different initiatives using teaching methods based on the British common curriculum, East African Commom Curriculum, curriculum designed by Center Coordinating Tutors (CCT) and some use the learning framework of NCDC.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of education and sports (MOES) Education Statistics 2003

<sup>2</sup> According to (UBOS) 2003, only 14%of children were enrolled in Pre-primary schools in 2002/2003. Uganda National Household survey 2002/2003 report p.19



Some schools revealed that they were using the primary school curriculum. Lack a unified curriculum implies differences in approach and ultimately the quality of education. Despite the fact that some schools have come up with innovate models that enhance holistic development of the children, It is the role of the Education Standard Agency (ESA) to regulate and streamline education standards in the country including Nursery education. Therefore the Ministry of Education through the National Curriculum centre should disseminate the learnignframework to all Nursery schools and train teachers how to use this framework.

### 3.4 Assessment

Just like in teaching, some school based their assessment of Nursery pupils on the primary school syllabus. Such a mode of assessment is not appropriate to children age 3-6 years. An appreciative inquiry as an approach to the provision of early learning is ideal for enhancing holistic development of children. Some children were being subjected to coaching in the evening to enhance their passing of exams. Exerting academic pressure on toddlers is tantamount to child abuse. The practice emphasizes mental development of the rather than stimulating holistic mental, physical, spiritual and social development as child playtime is substituted for academics.

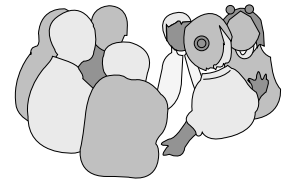
Nursery education is basically aimed at stimulating a child to education in preparation to enrollment into primary school and should never be construed as leeway for usurping enjoyment of their rights to play, to leisure etc. The only ethically defensible criterion for determining school entry is whether the child has reached the chronological age of school.

### 3.5 Instructional Materials

Nursery education is further characterized by acute lack of appropriate instruction materials suitable for early childhood learning. This was re-echoed by various head teachers interviewed. One of the teachers in Mukono summed it up that 'Even if schools were willing to purchase these books, they are no where to be found'. The scarcity of teachers guide materials has thus compelled some of them to adopt Primary School textbooks for teaching for their lesson.

### 3.6 Teacher qualification and training

There was an acute shortage of qualified teachers in most of the schools visited. This manpower gap has been bridged by primary seven and senior four leavers who for known reasons fail to continue with education. Privately owned institutions like Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) have contributed immensely towards the training Nursery teachers but their effort still need to be supplemented by the government. Pre-primary education has not attracted many professionals making the few available expensive to be hired by economically struggling schools.



Besides Nursery teaching has been earmarked as dumping ground for all students who fail to get else where to go albeit a few qualified candidates. A salary of 60,000 shilling a month is not attractive for any body with a better option and this seriously impacts the quality of services delivered. This whole argument depicts the value attached to Nursery education. It is high time the ministry stepped in to streamline training and remuneration of Nursery teacher to rectify and revamp early childhood learning in the country.

### 3.7 Inspection and Supervision

Inspection and supervision is only noticeable in a few school and even then, it suffers lack of coordination of supervising agencies. The survey revealed that in Kampala district alone, there about five different agencies with different mandates charged with inspections of the Nursery Schools. They include; the Division Education Officers (DEOs), Center Coordination Tutors (CCTs), Private Schools Association (PSA), Education Standards Agency (ESA), Division of Health Offices (DHO) and District Inspectors of Schools (DIS). This would in essence presuppose effective inspection which is to the contrary. Inspection ranges from once a term to once a year while other schools are not inspected at all, as a sequel of inadequate funding<sup>3</sup>. One of the DEOs attributed this to lack of expertise and funds. The state of Nursery education in the country underscores the value attached to early childhood learning in the country and calls for immediate action from all the concerned authorities.

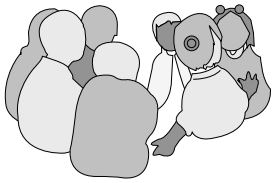
### 3.8 The role of Parents

Most parents do not really appreciate the value of Nursery education as such they take it to be a preserve of the affluent elites in urban centers. Majority of parents who seems to adore the practice only use these Nursery schools as safe heavens for keeping their children when they are away from home for work. Their role is limited to paying school fees and dropping their children to school early in the morning and picks them late in the evening. Most culprits were found to be men proving appointing to the fact that fathers/ males play a minimal role in early childhood learning and stimulation compared to their female counterparts.

The study however established some case of neglect and abuse of children by their “busy” parents, who drop them at school by 12:00am and picked them after 6:00pm. Some continue with the children to social places and either leave them in cars or keep with them till late in the night. One head teacher confirmed the practice and argued thus; “this is not only a problem for the child, but also an inconvenience to the School”<sup>4</sup>. This is sacrificing child right to good parenthood and care at the Alter of money. This vice should be castigated and parents sensitized to respect the rights of their children by all the stakeholders.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with the Assistant Commissioner for Pre-primary education

<sup>4</sup> The Head teacher of Bright Junior School, Wakiso indicated that this was a common malpractice by parents



### 3.9 Boarding Nursery Schools

The existence of boarding Nursery schools was one of the most outrageous findings of the survey. The existence of such schools is not sanctioned by the Ministry of Education and Sports but it is arranged by school proprietors in response to demands from some parents. Out of the 99 schools where the assessment was done, 4 were boarding Nursery schools representing 4%. In these schools the environment was not conducive for proper development of the children. Their diet was basically posho and beans, lacked play facilities and their health was at risk since they did not have sickbays. One headteacher confessed that if a child gets sick, he/she is given panadol and if there is no improvement he/she is sent home.

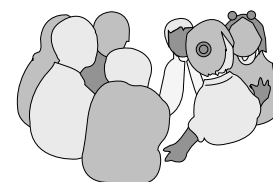
Although such schools can provide alternative care for children in given circumstances, it can never replace a family. Children need to grow up in a family setting and share the love and care of the parents or the care givers for a better start in life. It is the best interest of the child to spend reasonable time with parents or care givers and detaching them from their families infringes on their right to parental care and also affects their physical, emotional, cognitive and psychosocial development. A family is the first line of love, care and stimulation for their children and parents are the first and most important teachers to stimulate early childhood learning. UCRNN castigates this practice and urges MOES to discourage boarding Nursery schools with the view that no justification whatsoever overrides the principle of the best interest of the child.

### 3.10 Nutrition

Proper nutrition and health care is critical to the growth and stimulation of the mental faculties of a child to improve learning and other abilities. Children therefore need adequate diet. Nursery schools children spend half a day at school and a full day in case of daycare centers. Nutrition at school is thus an important component of early childhood learning which should be treated with the contempt it deserves.

Findings of the survey revealed a multidimensional approach to feeding in the Nursery schools depending on the socioeconomic class of the parents but on the overall schools are cognoscente of the need to feed children albeit quality and quantity in some cases. Besides, some parents pack food or snacks for their Children to eat during the break time. School feeding is therefore dependant on the socioeconomic consideration as pointed out by the head teacher of Shimoni Nursery School Kalagala in Mpigi district thus;

In Urban Nursery Schools, Children come from predominantly affluent families and the parents are more enlightened about the importance of Nursery education. As such, they also pay keen attention to the development of their Children; and are able and willing to pay higher fees that can take care of good meals and better facilities. In comparison, our parents here are predominantly poor and working for basic survival. The idea of a Nursery School is a luxury to them. In the end, it would be unrealistic to expect a School charging School fees of 8,000 shillings a term to provide eggs and milk to pupils every morning. No, we have not reached that level.



The concerns raised points to diversity nature of our society which requires minimum support by the government to surmount some of the problems to ensure equitable access to quality pre-primary education by all Ugandan children

## 3.11 The Right to Play

Playing is a very important component of Early Childhood Education and Development<sup>5</sup>. Through playing children are stimulated to learn and make meaning of the environment they live. Therefore enough need time should be allocated playing and resting. Most respondents were complacent with children's playing. What was lacking in most schools was facilitation for children's creativity while playing.

## 3.12 Sanitation and Hygiene

There a number of Nursery schools with poor sanitation this is a big threat to the health of the pupils. Some schools lack enough toilets. Boys and girls use same facilities creating congestion especially during break time. Besides, sanitation of these places was in most case not satisfactory. Pit latrines in some instances were located near classrooms and access to clean water was a big problem to many schools.

## 3.13 Attitude and Perceptions

The general attitude and perception of the public towards Pre-primary education was found to be negative. It's generally perceived as wastage of money thus many parents prefer to send their children to Primary School directly. This attitude translates into limited involvement of parents in running of the Schools and failure to pay School fees. Other working Parents drop their children at school as early as 6:30AM, only to spend the morning hours dosing in class and are picked from School after 6:00PM as the Parents return from work. This reflects total failure of the Parents to appreciate their role in Early Childhood Development and Education.

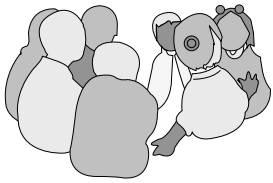
## 3.14 Resource Allocation

Pre-primary education does not attract adequate allocation of resources. It has been relegated to the private sector which is focuses on profits than service delivery. It is critical for a country to spend more resources on children under three years of age not only because it is a basic right, but also because it spurs further education, which contributes to development and as significant factor reducing social inequality.

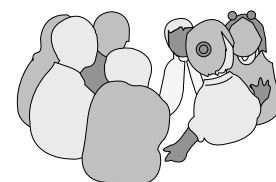
Devoting more resources especially to the most disadvantaged children should be the "first step" of a broader national early childhood care and education policy.

The returns to investing in early childhood programme are extremely high, particularly for the

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of education and sports (MOES) Education Statistics 2003



poor and disadvantaged yet the least likely to be involved in these programmes Early childhood programmes can also significantly reduce toll of children under five who die annually of mostly preventable diseases since ECDE combines education, nutrition, immunization, health, hygiene and care.



## 4.0 Recommendations

### 4.1 Introduction

These recommendations are based on the findings during the study and literature review pointing at areas which need consideration by the government and other stakeholders.

### 4.2 Lack of clear framework for operation of Nursery schools

The Ministry of Education and Sports should incorporate the changes and recommendations of the stakeholders into the draft ECD policy and pass the draft to streamline the operation of pre-primary Schools in Uganda. Lack of policy guidelines has promoted negative practices in the administration of Nursery Schools. Therefore inclusion ECD is an important policy matter which requires immediate response.

### 4.3 Curriculum review

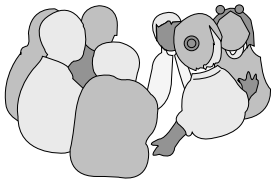
The learning framework developed by the National Curriculum Development Centre should incorporate the good practices from the various initiatives to create a uniform national curriculum. Lack of a unified national curriculum was pointed out as one of the stumbling blocks to the proper early childhood learning. There is a need for a comprehensive review to harmonize the various curricular being perused by different school. This review should be participatory involving various stakeholders like Nursery school teachers, consultation with parents and school owners. The learning framework should be widely disseminated to all Nursery schools and ECD centres and teachers trained on how to use it.

### 4.4 Improve Supervision and Inspection

MOES should coordinate and streamline the inspection process of Nursery schools in the country. The different agencies should be adequately resourced and be given clear and realistic guidelines or performance standards against which to monitor progress. In particular, the District inspectors of Schools, Center Coordination Tutors and the Education Standards Agency should be trained on effective supervision and monitoring of early learning and stimulation interventions as means of enhancing their performance.

### 4.5 Allocate more Resources to Pre-primary Education

As noted earlier, most of the hindrances of pre-primary education have got a bearing on the available resources. Its development has been hit hard by financial austerity translated into neglect. Despite well-documented long-term benefits ECDE has remained in the periphery of the national poverty eradication strategy the PEAP. This commitment should be expressed in a more pragmatic way by devoting more resource to create a ripple effect.

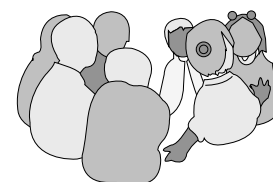


### 4.6 Need for More Sensitization

Parents and teachers need to be sensitized to appreciate the purpose of pre-primary education as a mechanism for enhancing the holistic development. There is need for a multifaceted sensitization campaign by all stakeholders to enlighten communities on the importance of Early Childhood Education. While workshops, seminars and information briefs are convenient in sensitization, the most effective sensitization tool is direct consultations and participation of the stakeholders as a means of soliciting their support.

### 4.7 The Ministry of Education should ban Boarding Nursery Schools

Due to child abuse and neglect associated with boarding Nursery schools, the Ministry should expressly put a ban on boarding Nursery schools. The Ministry should also commit resources to the inspection department to ensure compliance by all schools.



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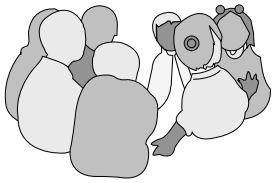
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