



**STRENGTHENING PEACEBUILDING  
COMPETENCIES THROUGH SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**A case study on Piloting Reformed Lower  
Secondary Curriculum in Uganda**

United Nations Children's Fund  
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Cover photo: © UNICEF. Beatrice Adong, 18 years, with friends during the break in Gulu district, Northern Uganda.

Author: Semine Lykke Brorson (Peacebuilding M&E Specialist)  
Principal editor: Dr. Monica Llamazares (Peacebuilding Specialist)

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## Executive Summary

Uganda is planning a significant reform of the country's secondary education in the form of a new curriculum that introduced both greatly amended teaching contents and methods compared to the existing curriculum, which was developed under British colonial rule in 1919.

In a partnership between Uganda's National Curriculum Development Centre and UNICEF, there has in September – November 2015 been carried out a pilot-testing of the reformed lower secondary curriculum. Under Unicef's Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Program, support has been provided to test excerpts of the reformed curriculum relating to peacebuilding competencies.

The pilot has been carried out in 23 schools in 5 Districts that have been sampled in Karamoja, Northern Uganda, West Nile and South-Western Uganda, and included test materials for the subjects of Social Studies, Life Education and Religious Education.

In this report the findings from a qualitative assessment carried out among 3 pilot schools in Napak District is presented together with feedback from students from approximately 20% of participating schools.

The qualitative feedback provided by teachers and students is in general very positive. Appreciation has been expressed about the changes in interaction, the learning results and the contemporary subjects, which are found highly relevant and applicable. Moreover, students report that prevalence of use of violence and threats has reduced greatly in lessons, where the reformed teaching methodology is applied and that the teaching stimulates practical skills development and strengthened social relationships.

Participants in the pilot at the same time point at challenges to be addressed. This includes the need for guidance about activity time management, class preparation, student's ability to make notes independently and access to required materials and facilities needed to apply the revised curriculum methods and contents. Further, students and teachers have provided constructive suggestions, including about how students can actively participate in the introduction and roll-out of the new curriculum.

## Overview of recommendations

Based on a qualitative assessment among pilot schools in Napak District, the following recommendations are presented in this report:

Topic	Recommendation
Learning and teaching	Incorporate explicit lesson and activity time management guidance in teacher guides
	Integrate introduction of concepts into textbook chapters to guide students' understanding and to mainstream literacy improvement
	Incorporate promotion of basic study skills to equip pupils for independent note taking and how to solve the types of tasks they will be given under the new curriculum (i.e. essays etc.)
Introduction of new curriculum in schools	Use the introduction of the new curriculum as an occasion to make the ban on violence and use of corporal explicit to all school stakeholders
	Shaping expectations of students, teachers and school stakeholders in accordance with the aims and provisions in the reformed curriculum
	Emphasize the modality and sequencing of the roll-out to ensure clarity about which cohorts will be taught using the reformed curriculum, and which that will complete using the existing curriculum
	Disseminate primary school teachers (and other stakeholders) about the contents and methods of the new curriculum, and monitor transition between the levels of education in relation to degree of natural progression in levels, methods and skills
Teacher training	Incorporating into the teacher training dissemination about the existing ban on violence and corporal punishment in schools
	Incorporation and provision of guidance regarding time allocation, work flows and preparation methods – also to be provided to school administration
	Provision of continuous and substantive teacher training
Facilities and materials	Provision of digital materials accompanying teacher guides and text books, i.e. on USB or CD, to enable use of multi-media in teaching
	Factoring in facility requirements for the application of teaching methods using the reformed curriculum into needs assessments guiding education infrastructure investments

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## 1. Introduction

A reformed lower secondary curriculum is scheduled to be rolled out in Uganda by 2017/18. An important step to achieve this was made when a revised syllabus was developed in 2014/15 by Cambridge Education and the National Curriculum Development Center (NCDC).

UNICEF Uganda operates a Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Program that since 2012 has promoted conflict-sensitive education and education as a peace dividend. At this background, NCDC and UNICEF have partnered in piloting elements of the reformed lower secondary curriculum that relates to peacebuilding competencies, promotion of tolerance, justice and human dignity.

As part of this, the NCDC has operationalized extracts of the lower secondary curriculum in the subjects of Social Studies, Life Education and Christian and Islamic Religious Education into teacher guides and textbook chapters for piloting. The following table indicates the aspects of the revised curriculum that links with the PBEA program objectives. Among these, the excerpts highlighted in blue have been sampled for piloting.

Subject	Class	Sub-Strand
Social Studies	S1	1.4 How we live now
	S2	2.1 How we live in communities
		2.3. How we lead ourselves
		2.5 How we own land in Uganda
		2.6 How we manage disasters
	S3	3.3 Human Rights
3.4. Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organisations		
Life Education	S1	1.1 My development
		1.4 Safety in my community
	S2	2.4 My relationships
	S3	3.3 Living responsibly
		3.4 Me and my community
	S4	4.1 Personal safety
		4.3 Caring for my community members
Christian Religious Education	S4	4.1 Conflict resolution
		4.2 Peace
		4.3 Justice
Islamic religious education	S4	4.1 Causes of conflict
		4.2 Peace
		4.3 Justice

Teacher guides and textbook chapters have thus been developed for *2.1 How we lead ourselves* on leadership roles, structures and styles and *3.3 Living responsibly* on community participation. In addition, NCDC has piloted the Christian Religious Education subject *2.3 on Human dignity*.

The pilot has taken place in 23 schools in Kisoro, Zombo, Lamwo, Napak and Bundibugyo Districts targeting approximately 1800 students in S2 and S3. The modality of the pilot

comprised a 3-day teacher orientation facilitated by the NCDC, upon which teachers returned to their respective schools with the tasks of identifying two classes to participate in the pilot and to slot the lessons into the school schedule.

In this piece the pilot is evaluated, and the results in relation to education for peacebuilding are assessed. This is in part based on a qualitative assessment among teachers and students in the test schools in Napak District, and evaluation feedback from 300 students who have participated in an evaluation survey.

## 2. Findings

In this section the feedback from teachers and students, which has been found in the assessment of the curriculum piloting, is presented. The scope of the assessment has been to encapsulate experiences and results of relevance to objectives of creating increasingly equitable and conflict sensitive education in Uganda, forming education experiences with potential to contribute positively to social cohesion, social resilience and non-violent conflict management norms. This is explored by looking at changes in teaching methods in the delivery of the reformed curriculum, impact on learning space and protective environment, learning results, the potential of secondary schools be platforms of peace and promotion of social cohesion, students' expectations and teacher's work experience. On that basis challenges and suggestions for improvements are presented in Chapter 3.

### 2.1 Changes in teaching methods

Both teachers and students express that the application of the revised curriculum builds on a significant shift in teaching methods in use while teaching the new curriculum sections. From the perspective of teachers, it is presented in the following way:

*"Before we [teachers] were just talking from the start to the end. Now, the class is very lively, and students enjoy. It's very interesting" - Teacher, St. Andrew's SS in Lotome*

*"In the normal running they sit fixed and stay there. Now they shift position and discuss. As a teacher I don't dictate ideas, and it is for me to guide only. Normally I tell them what to think and what is right" - Teacher, Kangole Girls SS*

The degree of change is also seen by students, who express how the learning experience changes as a result:

*"This curriculum is about things that are happening today, instead of what was in the past. That makes it easier to understand. The photographs and the text summaries make it easier to understand" - Students in Kangole Girls SS*

*"You don't get bored. You enjoy the lesson and feel like it should not end. The subjects are interesting, it makes you want to participate actively" - Students in Kangole Girls SS*

While there is unambiguous positive feedback about the shift in teaching methods prescribed in the curriculum, a teacher indicated that time management of lessons arises as an issue for teachers, which they haven't had to engage with to the same extent in the new curriculum:

*“The discipline changes; normally the teacher has the power to make people silent, but here they have to discuss and be noisy. And time management – sometimes they take long and they need the teacher to manage the time” – Teacher, Kangole Girls SS*

The same teacher elaborates that the guidance on duration activities can be difficult to adhere to:

*“The scheduled activities tends to exceed the time allocated” - Teacher in Kangole Girls SS*

This points to the importance of high level of attentiveness of time management guidance in the teacher guides that will be developed for the new curriculum. It should also be factored in whether all schools have lessons of the same duration, or if they vary and if so how to deal with that. Moreover, teachers are found to take on more of a role as a facilitator of learning, and is likely to need training and guidance for how to manage this reformed role and approach in teaching.

## **2.2 Impact on learning space and protective environment**

The change in teaching style prompted by the group work and experiential learning methods in the reformed curriculum is reported to influence the social dynamic in the classroom as well as the extent to which students’ find the learning space conducive and safe. In the words of a teacher:

*“The atmosphere in the classroom is so good. The learners’ attention is on the lesson because of the environment; you do things practically. They learn things that happen in their surroundings, that they practically see. In fact, the learners still want to stay in class when it ends” - Teacher in St. Andrew’s SS in Lotome*

Particularly the social dynamic and student-teacher interactions are reported to change:

*“It [the new curriculum] has made us interact with the teacher. Everyone understands and we laugh together [with the teacher]. It encourages team work with teachers, we debate with teachers. You can go and consult a teacher about something you are not sure of; we now dare to consult on difficult questions” – Students in St. Andrew’s SS in Lotome*

*“This curriculum has also made students be free, they are discussing with each other. Even if someone has been shy, that person goes and does something on the blackboard. It encourages group discussion. Students continue in discussion groups outside the classroom, handling the ‘old’ curriculum” Teacher in St. Andrew’s SS in Lotome*

Students emphasize an inclusive character of the learning processes, that acquiring knowledge is easier and more accessible to everyone:

*“Everyone participates, it is very interesting and everyone knows the answer, because everyone can think and give their say. Everyone is given a chance to talk, through discussion and then sharing with the whole class. In the beginning we feared it, but we got used to it and now it is ok” – Students in Kangole Girls SS*



*“We now do presentations in class. As a group we get a secretary and a chair, and these roles rotates so everyone gets the experience. We learn to be free and to engage in team work. Before you just sit and listen, but now your views also matter. You gain confidence before others”* – Students in St. Andrew’s SS in Lotome

Students further stress that the participatory learning process, the practical and experience-based learning along with use of visual learning aides stimulates more in-depth learning, and that it is found to be easier to remember knowledge acquired in this way:

*“In the previous [curriculum] getting skills is very difficult, but now we have come to know and it makes us creative, i.e. by using things in our environment to make things”*– Students in St. Andrew’s SS in Lotome

*“In the normal lesson the teaching is tough, but now we have seen that it can be easy by being practical. In this way it will be much easier for us to pass in examination”* – Students in St. Andrew SS in Lotome

*“The teacher will give the booklets and we discuss what the answer may be. It makes it much easier to remember. If one provides a wrong answer the teacher will guide instead of saying ‘we shall meet’ [as a threat]. The attitude of the teacher is different, here they share their own experience and make students do the same”* – Students in Kangole Girls SS

In addition to strengthening learning results, interviewed students articulated that the learning experience gives them confidence in their own abilities, and the relevance of what they are able to contribute with.

In relation to discipline and class control, major changes are also noted by both teachers and students based on their experience of 5-8 lessons using the reformed curriculum materials:

*“There is no way of indiscipline in the classes. There is no forceful disciplining. The teacher gets less frustrated over wrong answers.”* – Students in Kangole Girls SS

*“In the old curriculum, when the teacher brings an exercise, or you are late, you are punished by being told to go slashing [grass] or digging. Now you are corrected. Before you would have you notes checked and [get] punished if they are not made, but not it is more oral and no punishment”* - Students in St. Andrew’s SS in Lotome

*“Nowadays I move around the class giving guidelines and instructions, and supporting their group work. It is a very good method, it helps in class control. When you are moving around like that everyone is attentive, everyone concentrating”* - Teacher, St. Andrew’s SS in Lotome



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Students report with one voice that the social and teaching environment is more favourable in the lessons using the new curriculum than what they are used to. The interaction and social dynamic between both teachers and students in the classroom - as well as among students - is found to change significantly, contributing to a friendlier and more comfortable learning environment.

The changes in social dynamics is also reported to increase participation and create a conducive space for students to seek clarification and ask questions when needed, that contributes to a positive spiral of enhanced learning.

The roll-out of the reformed curriculum, and the training and dissemination activities associated with it, forms a highly relevant opportunity to further this by making explicit and enforcing the existing ban on violence and use of corporal punishment in schools.

### **2.3 Learning results – knowledge and skills development**

This section of findings builds on qualitative records obtained through interviews with students and teachers in pilot schools in Napak District based on their experience using the pilot reformed textbook excerpts.

Students themselves emphasize that the new curriculum provides practical, applicable skills; that it encourages creative thinking about how to make use of things in the surroundings, and that it stimulates social skills as well. Teachers emphasize that the new curriculum introduces concepts that students are introduced to for the first time, and that the substantive understanding of the concepts they are expected to apply needs to be built first:

*“There is interest in the topics. They participate and discuss, but sometimes go astray because the concepts are difficult. The questions tasks them to give views on how i.e community participation leads to peace. They are unfamiliar with the concepts, the practices and don’t have the experience of participating, so it is difficult for them to talk about” – Teacher, Kangole Girls SS*

It appears important to factor this into the textbook development, so that concepts consistently are introduced prior to students being expected to apply them. A potential way of dealing with this could be to integrate concept introduction and explanation with the literacy mainstreaming of the curriculum.

Another challenge mentioned by a teacher relates to the need for students to be able to make notes independently under the new teaching methods :

*“It is difficult for the students to make notes for themselves when they are not provided by the teacher”- Teacher in Kangole Girls SS*



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In addition to the participatory character of the teaching methods, the introduction of a notes-are-not-provided-on-blackboard learning environment as a drastic change for students, who have been accustomed to this throughout their educational cycle. Emphasis on strengthening basic study skills may be a very relevant feature to include in the roll-out of the new curriculum, so student become equipped to navigate in the learning methods they will be subjected to.

In terms of skills development, both teachers and students indicate changes in the ability to speak in public, engage in discussions and collaborate in team work:

*“Now there is no fear of presentations. They have learnt to do group work as a team. It improves their reading skills that they are reading with and for each other. In the old curriculum as a teacher you don’t know if they read, because you are just there talking by the black board”* Teacher, St. Andrew’s SS in Lotome

Students feel that the content is widening their horizon, both in knowledge and with information that stretches beyond their immediate surroundings:

*“It makes you not to be idle in class. It makes someone exercise the talent of speaking in public through discussion. It widens your critical thinking, i.e. in relation to causes of violence. It relates more to your life than i.e. the origins of the Bantu ethnic community”*  
– Students in Kangole Girls SS

*“We have come to know things we had never known, such as the roles of political leaders and the people who have contributed to peace in Uganda. It will be good on the side of those who start on this curriculum where things are easy. We would pray it was us; we would pass our exams”* – Students in St. Andrew SS in Lotome



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Further, the revised curriculum appears to have capacity to change the outlook to a national and international orientation:

*“The students of the new curriculum will be very lucky. [...] They will be getting wide knowledge, know about the whole world. Now you only know about what is happening in Napak District, but they will know what is happening in the whole world”* - Students in Kangole Girls SS

## 2.4 Secondary schools as platforms for peace and promotion of social cohesion

Curriculum reform is a powerful instrument to foster societal change. It shapes the knowledge systems, skills and participation patterns that graduates enter into social contexts with. In this part of the assessment it is explored how the education experience changes in this regard. This is done by looking into students' experience of social relationships, gender interaction, vertical relationships within the school and schools' potential to showcase non-violence.

Students across assessed schools articulate the impact the experience of lessons following the revised curriculum has their social relationships:

*"It has made us create friendship within [among] ourselves and with the teachers. After the class we go and interact with other students and community members."* – Students in St. Andrew's SS in Lotome

Teachers further observe that the learning space prompts changes in gender perceptions and interaction:

*"In relation to leadership roles they looked at girls as someone not taking leadership roles, but now they see that even government is encouraging it"* - Teacher in St. Andrew's SS in Lotome

*"There is a serious change in the interaction between boys and girls. The girls used to be shy, but now they are being trained in being free with others. They discuss and even challenge the boys when they are making presentations"* - Teacher in St. Andrew's SS in Lotomes

In relation to the potential of secondary schools to be platforms of peace and promoting social cohesion, important observations have been made about increase in awareness about causes of violence through the teaching:

*"We got to talk to our teacher about causes of violence. That something we had never had a chance to talk about before"* - Students in Kangole Girls SS

The learning contents is reported to create space for students to talk to adults about sensitive issues such as domestic violence, sexual violence and inter-communal violence, which is indicated as a new form of interaction. Further, the teaching contents is found to influence teacher's behaviour and ability to act as role models in relation to non-violence:

*"There is no caning [in the classes using the reformed curriculum materials]; the teachers are talking about prevention of violence, so there is no way they could then at the same time be using violence"* Students in Kangole Girls SS

The methods in the new curriculum is experienced as creating a less forceful and threatening interaction between teachers and students in the teaching situation, while the contents on violence prevention and peace appears to have potential to change expectations from students on teachers' use of corporal and other forms of physical punishment. Coupled with a roll-out of the VACiS prevention mechanisms entailed in the Reporting, Tracking, Referral and Response

(RTRR guidelines), this may provide an avenue to address prevailing norms of violence in Ugandan schools.

## 2.5 Students' expectations

The pilot-testing has been found to prompt attentiveness to the importance of clarity of communication as the curriculum is introduced and rolled-out to all stakeholders, particularly students, teachers and school administration.

*"People need to be informed about the new curriculum. Right now, people are fearing. They have heard a new curriculum is coming, and it gives fear"* – Students in St. Andrew's SS in Lotome

There appears to be some awareness that a curriculum reform is underway. Shaping the expectations of what it means, as the information spreads will be crucial. When students at Kangole Girls' SS were asked about what they were told about the new curriculum when the pilot was launched in their class, the answer indicated high expectations on access to computers and internet:

*"We were told that there is a new curriculum coming, which will introduce laptops and phones in school. Other subjects would be merged, and the new curriculum needs critical thinking. Not the teacher writing on the blackboard, but your own thing"* - Students in Kangole Girls SS

Forming expectations in line with what is likely to materialize in schools as curriculum is rolled out will be important. In relation to this clarity about the modality of the roll-out needs to be ensured. At present, there appears to be expectations that *all* years of secondary school will commence implementation in the same year, which points at the importance on disseminating information both about contents, methods and roles as well as the practical modality and sequencing of the roll-out.

## 2.6 Teachers' working experience

The teachers' commitment to the roll-out of the curriculum is going to be essential for its success. Further, a conflict analysis of the education sector in 2014-15 indicated that in primary schools the teachers' work experience and the thematic curriculum reform carried out has led a high level of conflict and grievances that affect the delivery of education. Against this background, feedback has been solicited from the teachers piloting in Napak District on how their experience and expectations of the roll-out are from the perspective of secondary school teachers. Comments indicate that a shift in 'work-load' is anticipated. There is attentiveness to that in order to successfully apply the new curriculum, teachers' will likely have to spend more time on preparation:

*"The new curriculum takes longer to prepare as a teacher because you have to make a lesson plan and learning aides. But it also depends on the subject. You need to find a way for each and every students to learn"* – Teacher at St. Andrew's SS in Lotome

At the same time, interviewed teachers point to that the workload on the teacher while being in the classroom reduces as exemplified by a teacher from Matany:

*“The old curriculum has a very big work load on teachers, and the new will reduce the workload. I will guide practically and give them time to present and wrap up”* – Teacher in St. Daniel Comboni, Matany

As it may be of relevance to include elements of promoting study skills among students, it may be applicable to include in the training of teachers aspects of preparation methods and time allocation for various tasks. In the same way it may be relevant to incorporate into the teachers’ guides information about expected preparation time for lessons – both to guide teachers themselves and to get a joint understanding between teachers and school management about work flows and time management.

### 3. Challenges and suggestions

The feedback from students and teacher about the methods and contents of the excerpts of the revised curriculum has overall and generally been positive. In the pilot schools in Napak District teachers and students alike are positive about the changes in interaction, the learning results and the contemporary subjects, which are found highly relevant and applicable.

At the same time, they have pointed out issues that may arise as challenges in the larger-scale roll-out, and identified suggestions and opportunities to maximize the success of the curriculum reform.

#### 3.1 Teacher training

Teachers in the pilot went through a 3-day orientation ahead of implementing the pilot in the classroom. It is pointed out that teachers will need more continuous and substantive training, and that there in each school needs to be a critical mass of teachers skilled in the new curriculum:

*“Teachers need more training. A short orientation is not enough. A higher number of teachers are needed in schools” – Teacher in St. Andrew’s Comboni SS, Matany*

#### 3.2 Education infrastructure

Another challenge mentioned relates to the educational infrastructure required to effectively implement the revised teaching methods:

*“Using the new curriculum there is going to be a challenge because we don’t have good infrastructure. As a teacher I don’t have the space to move between the rows. How will students work in groups and make presentations?” - Teacher in St. Daniel’s Comboni, Matany*



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While both teachers and students are excited about the participatory and experience-based methods, some schools may face great challenges due to class sizes and lack of infrastructure that accommodates the use of these methods. It could be considered if these factors to a greater extent can be factored into needs analysis for infrastructure investments.

Further, several schools express challenges in using multi-media in the teaching as prescribed in the teacher guides and text books, either due to lack of equipment, connectivity or access to a multi-media resource base to be used. As the curriculum rolls out, and elements of multi-media based teaching is incorporated, clarity about how to access such resources needs to be in place.

Strategies could include to provide digital material kits, i.e. on USB or CD, to accompany the teaching guides and text books. Additionally, investments in schools' IT infrastructure and internet access would also positively contribute to the possibility of using multi-media actively in secondary schools.

### **3.3 Access to learning materials**

The difficult access to three categories of learning materials have been mentioned as challenging. The first, covered above, is the multi-media materials such as video clips etc. that is incorporated into several activities. The second is booklets/students text books in which tasks are described and reference readings and materials are found. In the pilot several schools had insufficient numbers of the booklets for all students to use. As the large-scale roll-out occurs, it may be worth considering how access to learning materials can be improved, and how potential constraints in access could be mitigated. It may be considered relevant to look at using digital learning aids such as DigiSchools in secondary education, which would combine access to multi-media materials and potentially mitigate cases of absence of book.

The third relates to constraints in access to materials such as flip charts and markers, which schools have not been accustomed to obtain and use – but that are integrated materials in the pilot textbooks. As such, guidance on school procurement of materials may be relevant to provide.

### **3.4 Student participation in introduction of new curriculum**

Students in St. Andrew's SS in Lotome had an interesting idea about how students they can play a role in strengthening a good reception of the new curriculum, by engaging them in informing students in other schools:

*“People need to be informed about the new curriculum. Right now, people are fearing. They have heard a new curriculum is coming, and it gives fear. It would be good to take students from schools who have tried it to go and introduce it to other schools, so they will also love it”* – Students in St. Andrew's SS in Lotome

This suggestion could be institutionalised in two ways. Firstly by engaging students that have participated in the pilot testing in informing students in nearby school, and secondly through a

strategic engagement with the National Students Association that has reach to all secondary schools in Uganda.

### 3.5 Transition between curricula

#### 3.6.1 Cohorts completing on the existing curriculum

Among one of the potential spill-over effects of the reformed curriculum is that as it is rolled out in the classes beginning in 2017, the capacity building of the teachers may benefit students that simultaneously are enrolled and yet to complete using the existing curriculum. A teacher says:

*“They learn a lot more and more things – they even learn more out of the ‘old’ curriculum when they use these approaches to understand”* Teacher in St. Andrew’s SS in Lotome

In the school in question the teacher has introduced debating and group work in the classes following the ‘old’ curriculum, and students have on their own initiative continued using group work outside the pilot classes in order to strengthen their understanding.

As such, it could be of relevance to provide guidance for teachers about how to integrate some of the methods in the teaching in the classes that will not shift to the new curriculum, but will be taught by the same teachers.

#### 3.6.2 Transition between primary and secondary curricula

Students emphasize the relevance and importance of preparing and supporting the transition between primary school and secondary school on the new curriculum for students to be acquainted with critical thinking and participatory methods:

*“There can become confusion because of the change in teaching between primary and secondary education; there is need for more critical thinking in primary for students to be prepared for this style of secondary education”* - Students in Kangole Girls SS

As the new curriculum is rolled out, it may be worth to monitor and examine how commensurate and preparatory the application of the Primary School Curriculum, and to ensure that children experience a natural progression in levels, methods and skill