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BRIDGING GAPS: A CALL FOR A CHILD-CENTERED BUDGETING IN UGANDA

INTRODUCTION

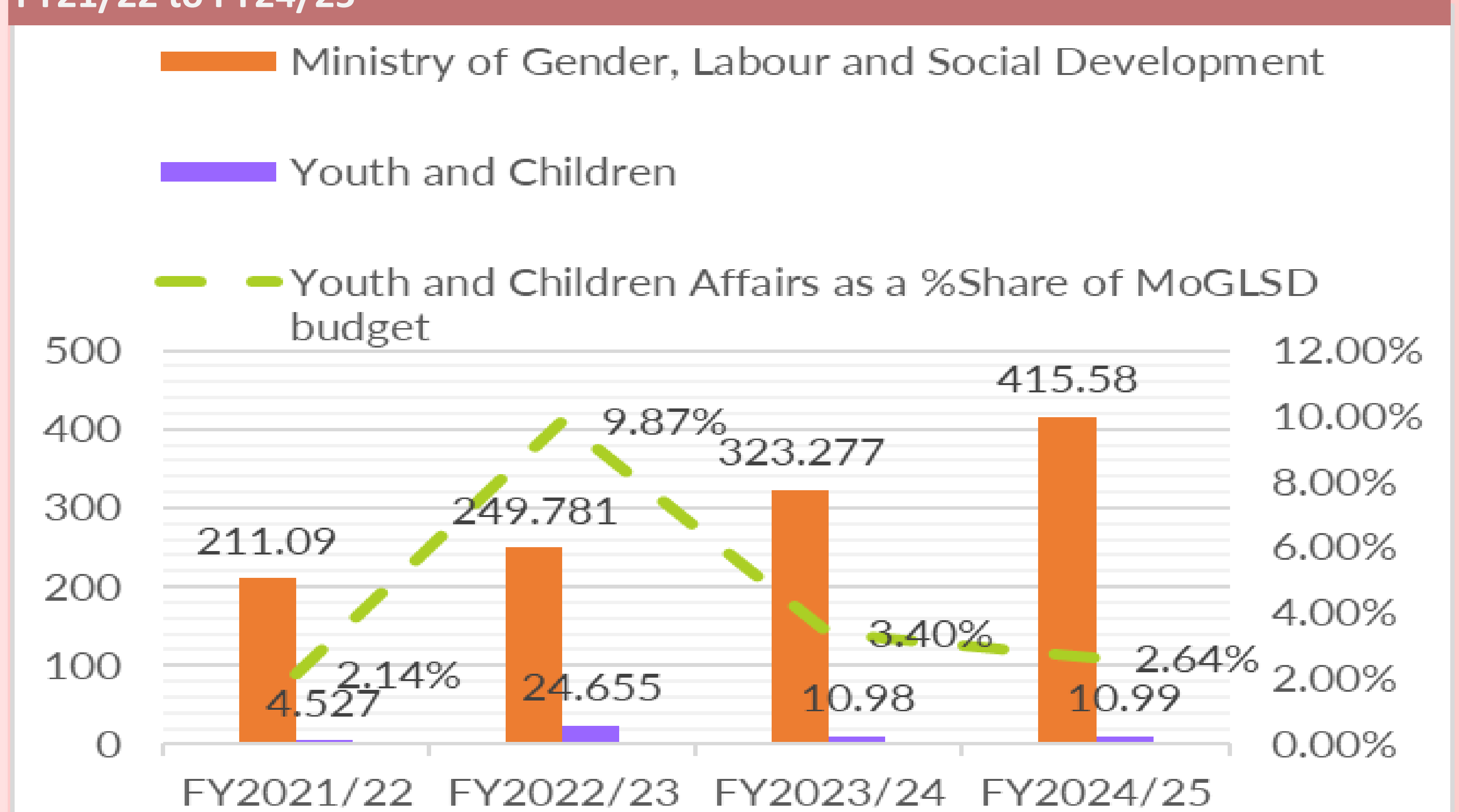
On going Reginal Budget Consultative Meeting In Gulu

Uganda's 2024 National Housing Census reveals a striking demographic trend: children (0-17 years) and youth (18-30 years) comprise 73.2% of the population, making Uganda one of the youngest countries globally. With such a youthful population, policymakers must focus on youth-centric planning and budgeting to secure Uganda's future.

However, the 2024 Multidimensional Child Poverty Report presents alarming findings: 70% of children lack age-appropriate books, 40% experience hunger, 33% suffer from stunting, 1 in 3 cannot access healthcare, and 30% lack basic hygiene necessities.

While Uganda's National Child Policy (2020) aims to enhance child well-being, these challenges are compounded by the constraints of public financial management. Effective budgeting is crucial to ensure children's rights to survival, development, protection, and participation.

Figure 1: Budget allocation to the Youth and Children Department (UGX Bns) – FY21/22 to FY24/25



FY2024/25 Budget Overview

Uganda's FY2024/25 budget increased to UGX 72.130 trillion, up from UGX 52.736 trillion in FY2023/24. This includes domestic revenue (UGX 32.38 trillion), budget support (UGX 1.393 trillion), and project support (UGX 9.583 trillion). However, a large portion of this budget is directed toward debt-related commitments: external debt repayments (UGX 3.149 trillion), domestic refinancing (UGX 12.021 trillion), and interest payments (UGX 9.064 trillion).

Amid these expenditures, the human capital development program, which encompasses child-sensitive interventions, will see an increase from UGX 9.58 trillion in FY2023/24 to UGX 9.964 trillion in FY2024/25. However, the budget for the Youth and Children Department remains stagnant at UGX 10.9 billion, despite children and youth making up 73.2% of the population.

As the government prepares for FY2025/26, CSOs have raised key concerns and recommendations across three critical sectors: health, education, and child protection.

Key Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Issues and Recommendations

1.Health Sector:

Malnutrition: Uganda faces high rates of malnutrition. CSOs recommend prioritizing and scaling up nutrition financing, increasing awareness, and promoting community-led initiatives to combat stunting.

Primary Health Care (PHC): The PHC system needs more investment. CSOs suggest enhancing the PHC budget to train, retool, and incentivize Village Health Teams (VHTs) and recruit additional staff under new health sector norms.

2. Education Sector:

School Inspection and Monitoring: Inadequacies in school inspection, particularly with the new lower secondary school curriculum and digital solutions, require urgent attention. CSOs call for increased resource allocation to the Directorate of Education Standards.

Rising Cost of Education: The rising cost of education threatens school enrolment. CSOs urge Parliament and the Ministry of Education to address this issue in the FY2024/25 budget, develop a national policy framework to regulate school fees, and protect access to education.

3. Child Protection Sector:

Violence, Abuse, and Exploitation: Uganda's children face violence, abuse, and exploitation. CSOs recommend boosting funding for district community-based services departments to strengthen child well-being committees and enforce policies protecting children from violence.

Child Participation in Planning and Budgeting: Children's voices are often excluded from planning and budgeting processes. CSOs urge the government to support District Local Governments in promoting meaningful child participation and to prioritize resourcing for the child participation strategy once the review process is finalized.

Conclusion

Government budgets have the power to advance children's rights, and children are major users of public services. Uganda's Vision 2040 hinges on investing in child development to harness its young population's potential. Therefore, the government must rethink its approach to public investments, ensuring families are supported to protect and nurture their children while fostering resilient communities. This will create stable environments for children to thrive, paving the way for sustainable development and prosperity.

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