

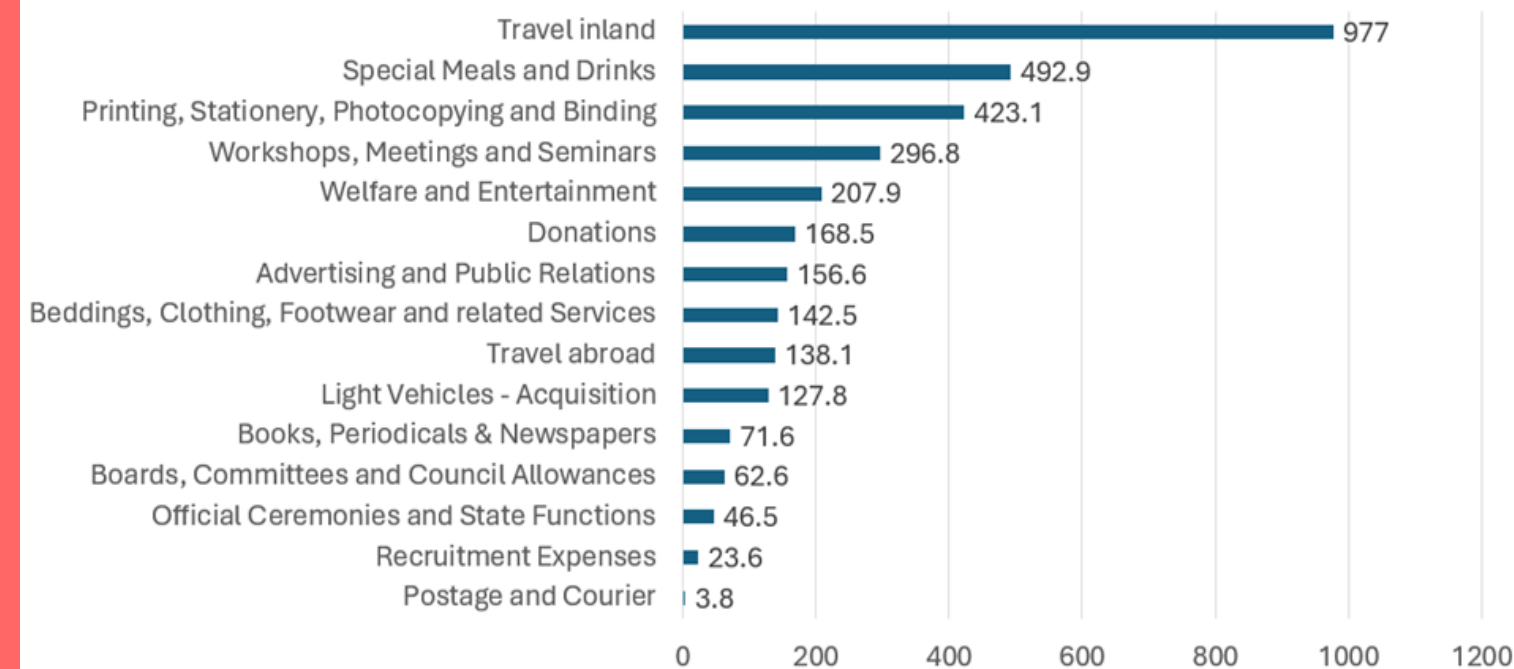
ENTERTAINMENT OVER EDUCATION: UGANDA'S BUDGET DILEMMA

INTRODUCTION

As Uganda rolls out its national budget for the Financial Year 2025/26, questions are emerging about the fairness and inclusivity of public expenditure priorities. While the government claims that the budget is pro-poor and people-centred, a closer examination of specific allocations reveals a potential disconnect between rhetoric and reality. One particularly glaring contrast lies between the allocation for welfare and entertainment, which stands at **UGX 207.9 billion**, and that for special needs education, which is allocated only **UGX 4.758 billion**

Not Poverty-Friendly Budget Areas (UGX Bn)

These are allocations that often absorb large resources without directly benefiting the poor. Waste full expenditure allocations increased by UGX 724.8 billion from UGX 2,614.6 billion to UGX 3,339.4 billion.



A Pattern of Underinvestment in Special Needs Education

This is not the first time special needs education has been marginalized in budget allocations. In FY2024/25, only UGX 0.036 billion (or UGX 36 million) was allocated to this critical sub-sector out of a total education budget of UGX 356.5 billion.

This represented a mere 0.01% of the total education vote a deeply insufficient amount considering the high cost of providing inclusive education, including specialized teaching aids, infrastructure adaptations, and training for special needs educators.

Now, in FY2025/26, the allocation has increased to **UGX 4.758 billion** a notable jump, but still vastly overshadowed by the **UGX 207.9 billion** set aside for welfare and entertainment activities. The scale of the imbalance calls into question

Priorities and Pro-Poor Budgeting: A Conflict?

the government's stated commitment to inclusivity, equity, and social justice. Special needs education serves some of the country's most vulnerable children. These are learners who often require individualized support, assistive technology,

gy, and adapted curricula. Failing to adequately fund this area not only limits their potential but undermines Uganda's commitments under the National Inclusive Education Policy, the National Development Plan (NDP IV), and Sustainable Development Goal 4: inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

In contrast, while cultural events, sports, and public entertainment have their place in national cohesion and morale, the outsized allocation to welfare and entertainment more than 40 times the allocation for special needs education raises red flags about the budget's equity and developmental priorities.

What Civil Society Is Saying

Civil society actors, including Uganda Debt Network and Save the Children Uganda, continue to call for child-centric and equity-focused budgeting. These voices urge government to place a stronger emphasis on interventions that directly impact poor and marginalized communities.

"Allocating over 207 billion to welfare and entertainment while giving just under 5 billion to special needs education is a contradiction to the pro-poor narrative. It is not just about how much is spent but who benefits from what is spent," said One policy analyst during a recent post-budget dialogue.

The Way Forward: Rebalancing and Accountability

Uganda's fiscal policy must reflect its development ambitions not just through words, but through resource distribution that actively tackles inequality. Parliament, civil society, and citizens must hold government accountable and advocate for more transparent, equitable, and impact-driven budgeting.

A truly pro-poor budget must ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind, especially children with special needs whose access to quality education depends entirely on deliberate state support.

Conclusion

Budgets are not just financial documents they are moral documents. The stark contrast between billions allocated to welfare and entertainment versus millions to special needs education should inspire urgent public scrutiny and demand for reform. Uganda's journey toward inclusive development can only succeed when equity becomes central to every budget decision.

UDN'S WORK IN PICTURES



UDN with other CSO Partners during the Post Budget Dialogue. (UDN's Esther Mufumba on the far right)



Budget Literacy Trainings with local government leaders both political and technical from Gulu, Nwoya (Acholi), and Nabilatuk, Napak, Moroto (Karamoja).



CBMES Budget Literacy Trainings with Community Based Monitors, CSOs and Councillors from Amuru, Omoro (Acholi), and Moroto, Napak (Karamoja).



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