Critical issues in free education

One of the issues that stakeholders have raised is the lack of classrooms in schools. Enrolment of schoolchildren in schools has increased, but the number of classrooms has not kept pace with the increase in student numbers. This has led to overcrowding in classrooms, which affects the quality of education. The re-introduction of free education in the country has come with challenges that have not been adequately addressed.

By Louis Kambani

Bab es Salama. Although stakeholders have hailed the government for providing free basic education, they have named six challenges, which hinder progress in education in the country.

Stakeholders said poor improvements in the school infrastructure, unchanged capitation grants, non-payment of teachers' salaries, inadequate implementation of education projects, and poor sanitation are among the challenges that have been facing the sector for education for years.

They raised these concerns during a public debate on the 2017/18 budget which was held to discuss "What is changing in the education and agricultural sectors?" organised by Policy Forum.

Presenting his paper entitled "An overview analysis of the basic education budget ahead the 2017/18 fiscal year," Hakunzika research and policy analysis programme officer Bab es Salama. Although stakeholders have named provision of free basic education had increased pupil enrolment to pre-primary and primary schools to an average of one million pupils.

He said the increment had created new infrastructural demand, as 22,252 new classrooms had to be constructed to accommodate the number of pupils in the country and demand for classrooms had risen to 160,000, an average of 150,066 classrooms for primary schools and 12,566 for secondary schools, leading to this, the government requires Sh2.57 billion to construct new 25,552 classrooms, but the ministry plans to construct 2,000 classrooms during the 2017/18 fiscal year, amounting only 12 per cent of the demand.

Mr. Mwamwe said plans in the budgets of the President's Office (Regional Administration and Local Government) and the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children, which concurrently take charge of the education sector, were yet to be seen. He noted that the country had a shortage of 200,000 classrooms and 8.1 per cent of primary schools.

He explained that a shortage of administrative blocks stood at 5.4 per cent, a shortage of libraries at 5.8 per cent and a shortage of first aid facilities at 5.7 per cent.

Speaking on capitation grants, he said primary schools had been receiving Sh200,000 per pupil per annum and Sh25,000 per student per annum for primary schools, an average of Sh560 and Sh120 for a primary pupil and a secondary school student per annum.

"We believe capitation grants need to be increased to at least Sh250,000 for a primary school pupil per annum and Sh300,000 for a secondary school student per annum," he said.

He noted that teachers' access stood at Sh250 billion, non-salary claims at Sh40 billion and Sh3.8 billion pension claims for retired teachers and hailed the government for setting aside Sh90 billion to service teachers' salary claims.

"But, stakeholders' concern is what will be the fate of the non-salary claims, remaining salary claims and pension claims," he questioned.

He said during the 2016/2017 fiscal year, the government allocated Sh427 billion out of the total Sh937.6 billion earmarked to Higher Education Student's Loans Board and Sh70 billion to implement rural ministry's development plans in the country. According to him, as of March 2017, only Sh500 billion had been disbursed out of which Sh34 billion equivalent to 63 per cent was remitted to the Higher Education Student's Loans Board with the remaining Sh156 billion equivalent to 27 per cent disbursed to fund rural development projects.

"What we need to ask ourselves, such allocation of funds was the type of investment we expect in developing the country's education," he questioned.

As of March this year, he said only Sh29.2 billion equivalent to 6.6 per cent was spent on the implementation of the special education development projects out of Sh181.8 billion allocated.

Mr. Mwamwe said the Sh29.2 billion was disbursed to improve pupil's mastery of the three Ws under lines out of Sh380 billion, approved Sh150 million out of Sh607 million, allocated was used to improve sanitation and availability of clean water in schools.

"We need to think about the teacher-student ratio and incentives provided to teachers and the way they contribute to improve the quality of education in the country. I happened to visit a school with one teacher in Zigoma, how can such a school improve the quality of education or education?" he questioned.

For her part, economist lecturer at the Morogoro University, Godhicha Kinywanda proposed that the government should wisely be spent to address challenges facing schools such as purchase of tools, digging latrine pits and purchasing laboratory equipment and ensure the value for money was guaranteed.

Mr. Mwamwe said the teacher-student ratio and incentives provided to teachers and the way they contribute to improve the quality of education in the country. He suggested that the government should wisely be spent to address challenges facing schools such as purchase of tools, digging latrine pits and purchasing laboratory equipment and ensure the value for money was guaranteed.

On November 21, 2017, the government issued Circular No. 5, which implements the Education and Training Policy 2014 and directs public sections to ensure that secondary education is free for all children. This includes the removal of all fees and contributions. The circular states: "Provision of free education means pupils or students will not pay any form of fees or other contributions that were being provided by parents or guardians before the release of new circular." However, whilst most fees are covered, including exam fees, some indirect costs will still remain for example, for school and sports uniforms and learning materials such as exercise books and pens.