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*Speech by: Mrs. Bitamazire, Minister of Primary Education
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These words were delivered by the Honorable Geraldine N. Bitamazire, Uganda's Minister of State for Education and Sports (Primary), to an eager audience of educators, parents, and pupils as she visited three schools in Kazo County, Mbarara District. Her message was about the success local stakeholders had achieved in improving the ties between the Kazo community and the schools, and in improving the quality of teaching and learning in the schools. The outcome was expected to help Uganda implement its 1997 initiative to provide universal education to children of primary-school age.

The activity in Uganda is one of 13 being conducted in various countries as part of AIR's Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) project, sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The main purpose of IEQ is twofold: inform decision makers about policy and practice that reflect the reality of the school experience; and enhance the capacity of host-country educators and researchers to obtain and use the knowledge.

Jane Schubert
Director / Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project

"Thank you very much Mr. Kenyan. I would like to recognize all the distinguished people who are here. The members from the district team council, the local leader 01234, the leaders in your respective positions, the director and facilitators of the IEQ, my colleagues, teachers, my children and grandchildren who are here, and my fair Ugandans. What I'm seeing today has made me think that it is very good to live long - because I have lived long enough to see this project take off, and get to the stage where it is today. As you have been told when I was giving a key note address some years back about this program, I thought it was like any other joke, and I didn't think you would find me alive when it matured. But I feel satisfied today having gone to the project area to see the successes and the achievements which have been made by no other than the Ugandan local community people, what I thought at first was a dream.

So, I think Uganda is brave. Every now and then we get new ideas; every now and then we get programs. When Uganda started on the educational reform, sometime in the early nineties, we were looking for better education, we didn't probably think very much about the access to education. But with the early nineties, the idea of good, quality education was already now a growing force and reforms had started. UPE has made so much change in their system, that at one time I thought that the educational reform would not be successful. But now I'm so happy that this program and this project IEQ, is maturing at a time when we very much need it. Right now, Ugandans, what I have seen today is what we need countrywide; because we have got UPE we have 6.5 million children in primary schools, 6.5 million in primary schools alone—let us clap. And so, that means that a percent of the



national population are in primary schools, where the estimated population is about 20 million people. So, if we have 6.5 million in primary schools, as a result of UPE, than a good percent of our population is in primary school—we are very happy, because not too many developing countries have achieved that so far.

So, as we look today, as we try to see what to teach our children, as we are calling on our own communities, parents, and local leaders to join hands and help us give quality education, IEQ comes in - You clap. Do you know, when you want to dig, when you want to grab your bins, when you think you don't have all the seeds, and somebody brings the seeds?

As the minister for primary education, I sleep-but also spend some sleepless nights- sometimes I wakeup and say "6.5 million children of Uganda, what type of education are they getting? Today, just go to school and sit there, or are they learning something? How can I get the parents to support these children? How do we get the teachers to do their part? How do we get the local leaders involved? What mechanisms can we use to motivate and empower the population to support the children of this nation?" I go without sleeping...I go without sleeping, and this is true. So, when I come to this area, and I find the parents, and I find the teachers, and I find the children, and the leaders, and facilitators, and professors, working together to find the mechanisms to improve quality in education—Why don't I celebrate?

So, we are very lucky, this came on probably when we were not so desperate at that time, but now it matures at a time when we are desperate. When a teacher has got a 130 kids in a classroom, this project comes in. Where the students themselves are starting the monitoring; where the parents are discussing a good school, where they are ready to come in and put the infrastructure, and I look forward to seeing this replicated in all communities in the country. So, I'm very happy.

Now let me take you over to the macro aspects, because in Uganda we are aiming at modernization. We are looking to improve communities, all the people regardless, we are integrating society. But what we are saying is the goal to achieve all the aspirations in education. Now we come in with UPE as a strategy, to bring development in the country. To support the democracy, which we are dying for; and a strategy to enhance the decentralization, which we are implementing in our country. So, if education is a tool for development, then the concept should be accessible to all people. It's like a saying, "this meat is so good, but then you give it to a few people" so, if the meat is so good, why can't you make it available to all. We are saying that education is the best strategy for development. So government comes in to say, if we adopt education as a strategy for our sustainable development, let us make it accessible to as many people as possible. But, my fellow citizens of Kazoo, there are still some people who think that the access to primary education is a joke; it is a political propaganda. It doesn't concern us, but I think what we should go on with is that education is our tool for sustainable development. So, I'm very happy that you are all here, and your goal here, your main objective is to think together, work together, to improve the quality of education in this area, and in the country. Where have I ever seen this



cooperation and partnership—great, great. The challenge is now to IEQ. How can we quickly, immediately and urgently reach the areas. I think we should work urgently and immediately so that we eliminate all those people by persuading them, by carrying them through the process to make them realize what is their responsibility; what are the problems? - How can we solve them together? - What is a good school? - What is a good student? - What is a good teacher? Everybody in this country must get this message.

What I have discovered is that the process is so long, it is so refined and so very comprehensive that probably by the time it reaches Marato, Katido, I don't know if I'll be around again. Today, why don't we try this idea as quickly as possible? I'm telling facilitators please do something immediately and urgently. But I want to say to some communities and the parents, you have tackled some of the problems that have made us suppressed, you have tackled the problems, now why are people pointing at each other? - Why does my girl fail? Why doesn't she fail...Let me tell you as a parent of many children, a lot the problems of our kids start right from home?

Now, I was very happy to see that you are going as a community to take care of what makes children first. The first and most important thing is the child's rights. The quality of material that we are teaching in schools must be of proper quality. If a kid is not fed, if she goes hungry, she will not learn. We must see that kids eat, and have an active capacity to learn. Now, one other thing that I have never seen, monitoring of kids going to school. If the kid has missed lessons, and has not attended, monitoring should be practiced. Now, my fellow teachers, I always praise the teachers, they are the key to what we are talking about. Having your pupils evaluate you, that is the best you can do as a profession. I would like say that I appreciate all that you have done, you are very good.

With the IEQ we are very grateful, please convey our gratitude to your government, for what they are doing for us, and tell them that we are asking for more! Thank you so much for the facilitators who have been to Kazoo so many times and for so many meetings. We salute you as Ugandans; we salute you as the people who know the dedication of your country. And I want for us to renew our commitment to our children, and our future. So, I want to thank you all and hope IEQ will continue until the whole country is covered. And I want you all to appeal to our local leaders, to work with our communities and to find out what the problems are in our local communities - I am appealing for more cooperation as a team of all people. I will leave you, but I know what you are doing, you are doing good and for our country.