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Introducing a tool for thinking about government engagement in public services: the Uganda example

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Introduction ›››

Governments worldwide are realising the importance of promoting early childhood care and education (ECCE). The benefits – educational, economic, psycho-social and neurological – are manifest, and indicate better value for money than investment in any later stage of a person's education. However, many governments, particularly of developing countries, face a dilemma. Having invested heavily in universal primary education and fee-free schooling over the last few decades, state resources for investing in ECCE are very limited. As a result, much of the delivery of ECCE tends to be in the hands of private providers. This presents governments with a challenge. How do they assure quality of ECCE provision, and how do they determine how much to invest in ECCE and what interventions to spend it on when the resource pool is small and private interests dominate the sector?

This paper presents an accessible visual tool that has been developed to guide governments to make these decisions based on a logical and participatory process of policy-making. The tool could be adapted for any intervention where government engagement in services is being reviewed and where changes in state intervention will incur cost. The concept was developed by a Cambridge Education team under the auspices of the GPE-funded Project to review Uganda's education sector ECD Policy for the Ministry of Education and Sports. The tool emerged to assist the Ugandan government in making hard choices in relation to provision of ECCE for their nation.

The background thinking ›››

When Cambridge Education won a contract in 2017 to review Uganda's 2007 Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy, the project was confronted with the difficult task of playing politics. Although the policy was due for review, there was a general lack of evidence on what was actually happening in the early childhood education sector. There was no clear need or demand for a review, and no clearly enunciated vision to drive the implementation of a revised policy. Therefore, the impetus for review was largely premised upon collective stakeholder concern about the state of ECCE in Uganda, and a sense that Uganda was falling behind its East African partners in providing access to ECCE, and was likely to fail to meet its ECCE obligations under the Sustainable Development Goals.

We can summarise the stages of policy development and review that were undertaken as follows:

1. Identifying the need for policy change or creation
2. Gathering evidence and determining the vision for policy change
3. Deciding on the actual and aspirational options
4. Defining the new policy and determining government priorities
5. Implementing the policy

The Review of Uganda's 2007 ECD Policy project was commissioned to assist with **steps 1 to 4** in this process. With evidence in hand, from primary data gathered across ten districts in Uganda and from international literature review, Step 1 (identifying) was completed at the start of the project and a clear need for policy change was evidenced. Approximately **70% of 4-to-6 year old Ugandan children are not accessing age-appropriate ECCE services** and family income is the main determinant of whether children access pre-school, with children from poorer backgrounds least likely to have access, thus compounding inequality.

In beginning to address the various issues facing the ECCE sector in Uganda, the key question to be asked to determine the direction of policy change (creating a vision) was 'What role should the Government of Uganda adopt?' The possible Government roles include:

1. Regulator: developing and implementing a regulatory framework within which private and not-for-profit providers must operate
2. Funder: providing grants/subsidies to parents and/or providers to reduce the costs that they would otherwise have to cover from other sources
3. Training provider: delivering and/or subsidising training for professionals
4. Service provider: providing services/infrastructure/places directly, although not necessarily bearing the full cost of this provision

When considering these roles, the project team realised the need for a 'visioning and thinking tool' – some way of helping the Government of Uganda to review the role it is presently playing and what this means for the ECCE sector, and what a change in this role would entail in terms of policy change, resource investment, and other institutional shifts (such as legal ones). This led the team to consider the possible spectrum of approaches, from a minimalist approach to state engagement as regulator and overseer of a sector of educational provision that is largely non-state sector led, to an interventionist and expanded state role with greater engagement (as regulator as well as full-scale provider of subsidised or free services). The combination of these elements culminated in the creation of the tool, which has been used in Uganda's policy-making process to discuss early drafts of a revised ECCE Policy. Its value has been seen in promoting scenario setting discussions. Government officials can discuss an increase in state intervention and then debate the impact this has on quality and access as well as costs.

Explaining the Policy Arrows Tool ›››

The Policy Arrows Tool needed to encompass several elements at once:
• Identifying the role of Government – illustrating how it may change from its current role;
• Highlighting the potential role of non-state actors;
• Showing what level of resourcing and effort is required;
• Using these elements to illustrate an overall strategic vision.

The concept that emerged to answer to this need is illustrated by scenarios presented in Figures 1 and 2 below. These are hypothetical scenarios and are presented to show the way that the policy arrows can be adjusted to show different levels of public and private investment in ECCE,

different intensities of implementation and investment, and the resultant changes in impact. So, Figure 1 and 2 show situations of both private and public investment in ECCE, but in the second scenario (Fig 2) there is more complete delivery and training coverage, such that there is 100% access to ECCE and all ECCE teachers needing training can be accommodated in the existing training colleges. This scenario also includes considerably more regulation and communication by government. The end result is that scenario two (Fig 2) is more likely to result in higher levels of impact than in scenario one (Fig 1), in which the expected impact on access and quality is only moderate.
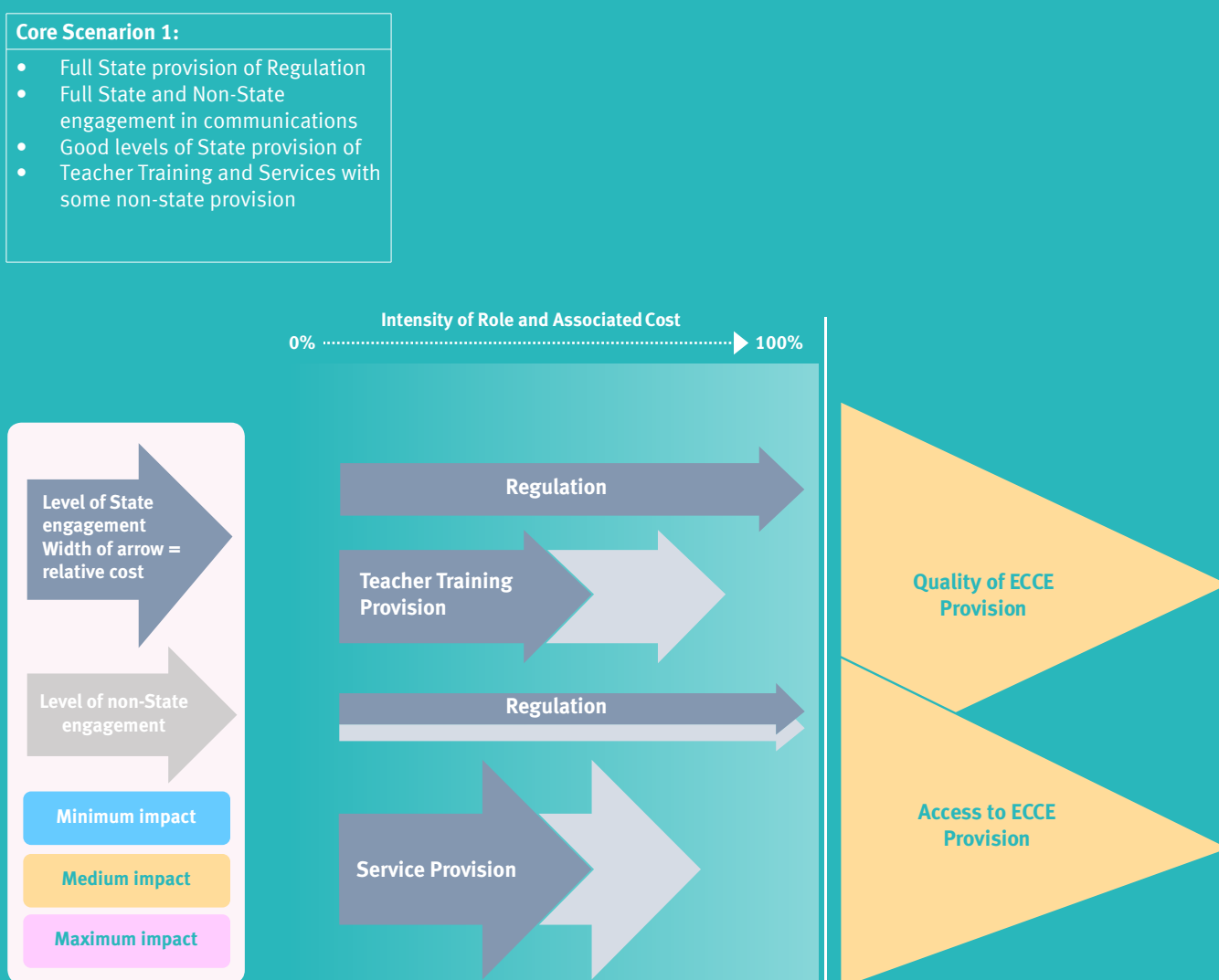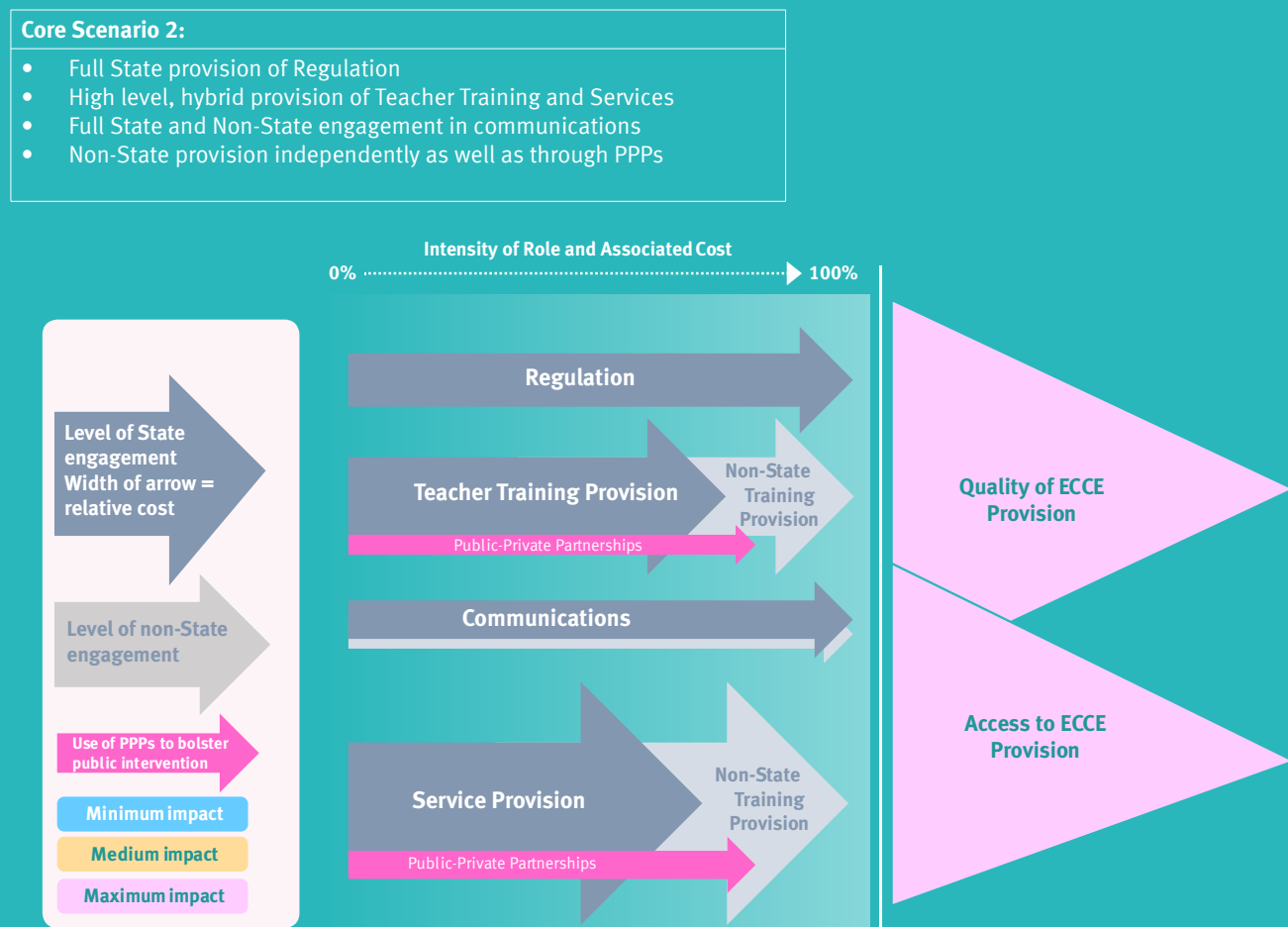
Figure 1: The outline of the Policy Arrows – Scenario 1

Core Scenario 1:
- Full State provision of Regulation
- Full State and Non-State engagement in communications
- Good levels of State provision of
- Teacher Training and Services with some non-state provision

Intensity of Role and Associated Cost

0% ···► 100%

Level of State engagement
Width of arrow = relative cost

Level of non-State engagement

Minimum impact

Medium impact

Maximum impact

Regulation

Teacher Training Provision

Regulation

Service Provision

Quality of ECCE Provision

Access to ECCE Provision

Figure 2: The outline of the Policy Arrows – Scenario 2

Core Scenario 2:
- Full State provision of Regulation
- High level, hybrid provision of Teacher Training and Services
- Full State and Non-State engagement in communications
- Non-State provision independently as well as through PPPs

The Policy Arrows diagram highlights the following elements:

- The intensity of State intervention in different aspects of the system;
- The involvement of non-state actors in the system and the modality for this i.e. through direct public-private partnerships, parallel and complementary engagement (as in the case of communications), or independently as private actors;
- The overall levels of engagement by the various actors between 0 and 100%, where 100% is assumed to account for full-scale, maximum provision of all services to their highest degree;
- The associated cost of each element of the system, where the thickness of the arrow gives an indication of resource investment in relation to the other elements;
- The impact on quality and access in terms of the levels achieved between minimum and maximum.

The dark arrows indicate the levels of public ownership, while the accompanying light arrow indicates private ownership. To reinforce this point, the pink arrows indicate the level of Private Public Partnership (PPP) as a significant modality for joint ownership. PPP is limited to service and teacher training provision, where limited government funding means that the private sector has an important role to play and is enabled by the government to do so. Most public involvement in the provision of ECCE services is in some form of partnership with private interests; some of the provision of teacher training also involves private finance (pre-schools paying for their teachers to attend training, etc). In the case of communications full government engagement does not exclude non-state actors as they advertise their pre-schools and undertake local research and

knowledge sharing. Regulation remains entirely a government function.

The thickness of the arrows has also been adjusted to give an indication of the relative costs of the four interventions (service provision, teacher training provision, communication and regulation). The costs of service provision are the highest as this includes providing ECCE sites, materials and maintenance, as well as subsidising salaries and user attendance. The costs of teacher training include the provision and quality assurance of qualifications and colleges, and the subsidisation of trainees. The costs for regulation are lower, but still substantial, as they include monitoring, inspection and support for implementation, management of registration, and collation of data and management of the EMIS. Finally, the costs for communication, which include nationwide sensitisation and advertising of ECCE, are lower as they are not recurrent costs, can be managed to gain large impact for low investment, and are not the sole responsibility of the government, even in a system where public sector communications are strong.

The diagram, therefore, becomes a thinking tool for its users, to help delineate issues and decide on policy. It can never be an exact predictor but by using the tool to diagnose existing system characteristics and then modelling potential future engagement, it is able to highlight the changing role that Government can play and the impact this has on the levels of access to services and their quality. This effectively enables the Government to see in visual form the reality of current provision (Fig 1) and propose possible visions for the future (Fig 2), as well as the implications for public, and private, investment. Ultimately, it also enables the Government to witness its political direction in action – how will its prioritisation look to the populace.

Once some consensus is reached on the vision for the role of government, then the tool could be applied in a more iterative manner to establish the options for implementation and their feasibility. This has been done in Uganda insofar as testing the Government's appetite to focus on quality in the provision of ECCE – quality being less attractive politically than access. Ultimately, what the Policy Arrows Tool helps government and stakeholders to do is to simply visualise a related set of activities as a whole, to predict intensity of engagement, and to thus see what levels of resourcing this would nominally imply. This should enable better planning of the interim milestones, which can be set to achieve progress.

So, the tool enables its users to take 4 steps:
1. Identify an overall vision for change in the role of the government;
2. Understand what type of engagement will be necessary to bolster the role of government;
3. Identify the level of intensity and resourcing that is feasible in the existing system;
4. Understand what impact this would have on overall achievement of quality and access indicators.

The tool enables its users to answer these questions:
• What role do we want our government to play in providing a specific service?
• What interventions and targets would this vision require?
• What implication does this have for investment and roles of different players?
• In light of this, can we achieve our vision? Should we be more ambitious or less ambitious?

The successful use of the tool assumes that its users:
• Agree on the need for change;
• Understand the available evidence that underpins the need for change;
• Are decision-makers within their organisations;
• Can collectively provide the necessary expertise to ensure comprehensive consideration of all the parameters of intervention and change.

If any of these factors are missing, it is important to identify that and address the gap, so that an iterative process for visioning is not undermined by reluctance or confusion.

Testing and refining the Policy Arrows: a Uganda example ›››

In Uganda, the Policy Arrows have emerged through consultations with the Government. Since the project itself is still ongoing, this concept continues to be tested and has already undergone three rounds of iteration. Therefore, at the time of writing, the authors continue to refine the tool and will update this paper as its application leads to reshaping of the tool.

To illustrate how the tool can work in practice, however, we can take one hypothetical example that recently emerged during a workshop in Uganda. See Figures 3 and 4 below for illustration of how the Policy Arrows were used by a group of Government, NGO and University stakeholders to assess the current position of Uganda and determine a potential vision for the updated ECCE Policy that is currently being drafted in Uganda.

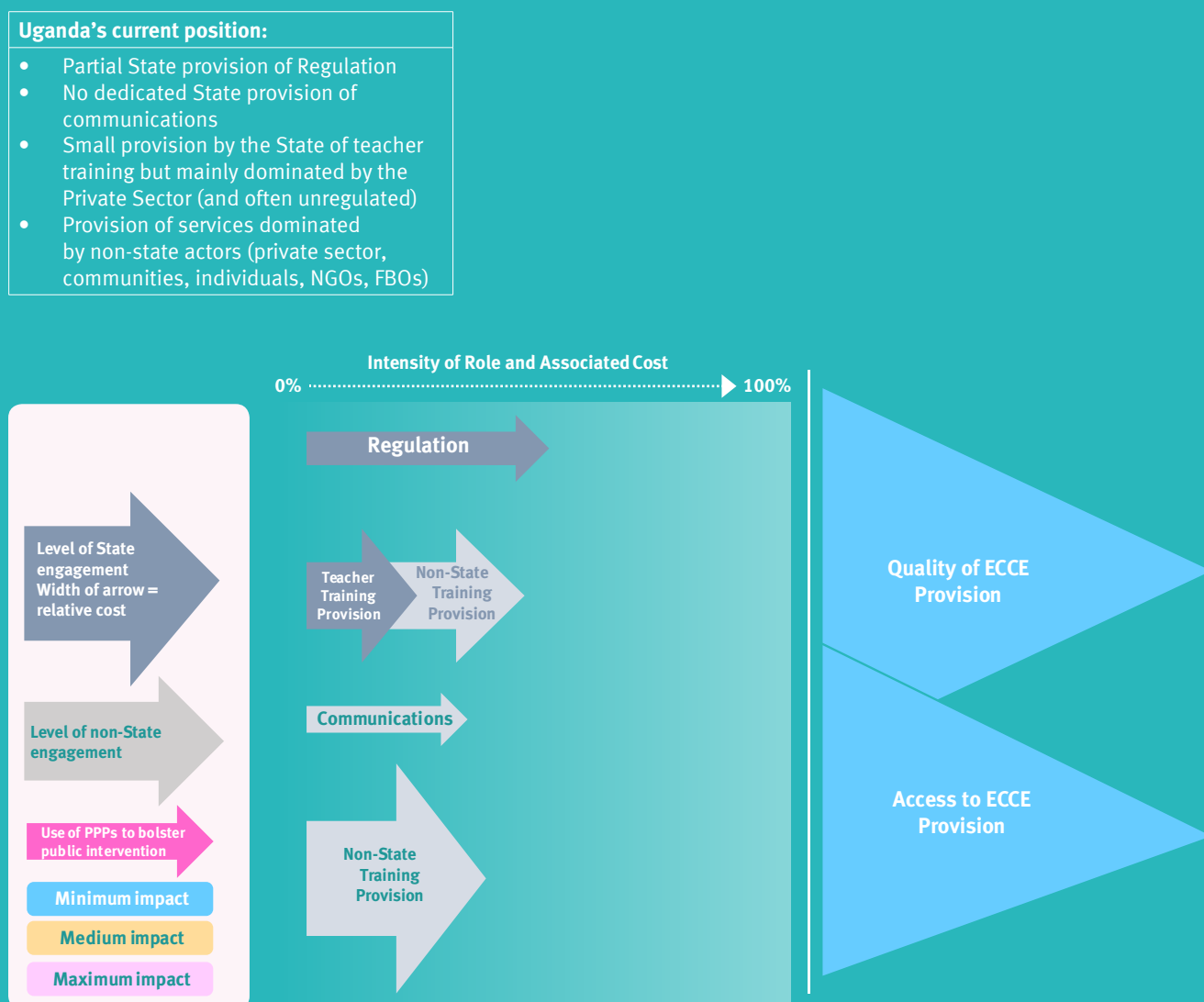## Figure 3: An example of the Arrows in action – Uganda's current position

Uganda's current position:
- Partial State provision of Regulation
- No dedicated State provision of communications
- Small provision by the State of teacher training but mainly dominated by the Private Sector (and often unregulated)
- Provision of services dominated by non-state actors (private sector, communities, individuals, NGOs, FBOs)

Figure 4: An example of the Arrows in action – Uganda's vision for the next ten years

Where we think Uganda is headed if ECCE policy reforms are adopted:
- Full State provision of Regulation and full engagement in Communications with some support from non-state actors
- Hybrid but not maximum State provision of Teacher Training and Services, with key role played by non-State actors and PPPs
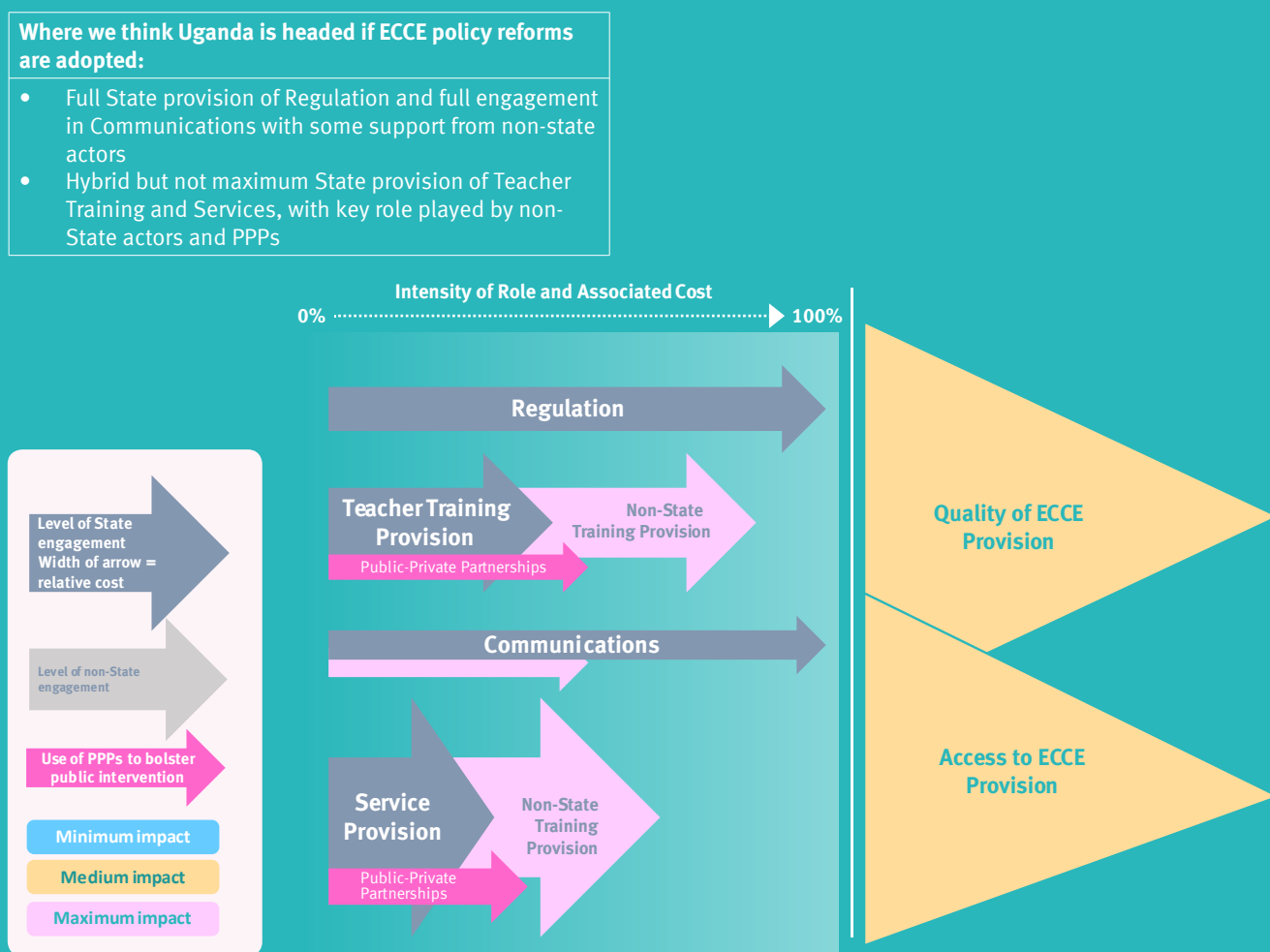
To elaborate Figure 4, the Government of Uganda may choose in its revised ECCE Policy, given limited available public resource, to focus on quality first, in order to build solid foundations on which to expand access. This means:

- Continuing to improve and maximise the role of the Government as efficient regulator;
- Investing more in teacher training provision, through for example subsidising the first year of training for unqualified/under-qualified entrants into the ECCE sector;
- Ensuring maximum intensity of communications which is relatively cheap but with potentially large gains in terms of advocacy, mobilisation of stakeholders, communities and non-state service providers, and widespread knowledge sharing;
- Slightly enhancing direct service provision and encouraging non-state provision under what will become a more efficient regulatory framework to ensure this provision is of adequate quality.

In making these decisions, the Government's role will shift from its current position whereby public sector impact on access and quality is low, due to the minimal involvement of the Government in all four aspects of the early learning sector. Therefore, in the vision for a revised ECCE Policy, instead of acting only as a regulator with adhoc investments into other areas of ECCE,

the Government of Uganda will improve its regulatory role and also become partially engaged in training and service provision. There will be a need to mobilise public investment, improve public-private partnerships and the enabling environment for non-state actors, and adjust the policy and legislative frameworks. However, the tool has served to highlight that with relatively minimal but strategically targeted investment and change, the Government of Uganda can hypothetically achieve immediate impact in terms of quality, as well as keeping access issues on the agenda.

Can the Policy Arrows be applied elsewhere? ›››

The Policy Arrows tool is still undergoing testing and refinement, as indicated above. However, it is expected that the tool can be used in any scenario where a government (or an institution) is seeking a change in its mandate and role, in order to achieve greater levels of access and quality to service provision. It could also be used to compare between governments or institutions, to provide an overall sense of responsibility and to highlight the assumptions being made about levels of engagement. The key is that it can be used as a consultation and consensus-building tool, for raising awareness about the possible elements and how they relate to each other within a vision for change.

**Early Childhood Care and Education
Think Piece Papers**
A Set of ECCE Topics for Consideration in Uganda

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