

58-year-old school has no classrooms

Alarming. More than 200 pupils have now dropped out of the school,

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BUKEDEA. A visit to Tokor Primary School in Bukedea District reveals what has become a common sight in many Ugandan rural schools: pupils learning under trees.

The government-aided school's structures were destroyed by rain-storm over four months ago.

As a result, more than 200 pupils have now dropped out of the school, which was started in 1959. Initially, Tokor had more than 500 pupils in total.

When *Daily Monitor* visited the school last month, the compound was full of rubble. The only available alternative for a classroom is under trees, which poses a challenge when it rains.

The head teacher, Mr Stephen Olaboro, said some of his pupils who have abandoned school have now joined their parents to engage in fishing in the neighbouring swamps of Tajar.

Mr Olaboro said he and seven teachers were posted to the school in 2012 after the school was coded into the government system but their working and living conditions have been poor. He added that the grass thatched huts where they reside are routinely destroyed by termites.

"We had proposed to have a parents meeting [in August] to come out with a solution on how this collapsed structures can be fixed but the par-



Derelict. A teacher conducts lessons in a dilapidated structure in Tokor Primary School, Bukedea District, recently. PHOTO BY SIMON PETER EMWAMU

ents told us they are tired of shouldering government work," he said.

Mr Stephen Okello, one of the elders in Tokor Parish, said the school that was started by their grandparents in 1959, has collapsed and resurrected for close to five times.

"In the early 60s to 70s, Tokor Primary School was one of the powerful community run schools. It later closed during the Amin turmoil," he revealed, adding that during the reign of Obote Two, the school, situated on five acres of land donated by the community, was revived but shortly closed due to the turmoil in the 80s, coupled with cattle rustling by the Karimojong.

Mr Okello said the school again reopened around 1995 as a community-run school with lessons basically conducted by fairly educated volunteers but it again closed after four years.

"The community, which gave this land is willing to add even more if only government can show support by having permanent structures in

PLANS

The district education officer, Mr Peter Auruku, said plans for the construction of two classroom blocks and pit-latrines for Tokor Primary School is in the pipeline for the next Financial Year.

Tokor Primary School, which it took over in 2012," he said.

Mr Okello, who served as sub-county clerk in Bukedea in the 1960s, said the rate of illiteracy in Tokor Parish and Tajar villages is saddening.

"You attend clan meetings in this locality and you see how would-be school going children can't read and write," he says.

Mr Joseph Ongodia, one of the teachers, said: "We have 27 primary seven candidates whose study atmosphere has drastically been affected, but we are trying all we can to have last moment lessons to see that they make it during the forthcoming PLE exams," he said.