

First Lady cautions schools on fees

GULU

Vision Reporter

The Minister of Education and Sports, also the First Lady, Janet Museveni, has warned both public and private schools' management against levying charges that have not been cleared by the ministry's authorities.

Mrs Museveni, while speaking on Mega FM, a Gulu-based radio station, said although parents may agree with the school to contribute money towards specific requirements, the ministry must scrutinise the charges, which have to be approved by the permanent secretary before they become mandatory.

She was responding to concerns by parents in the Acholi region about the exorbitant charges they are made to pay to schools, for instance, feeding, uniforms and purchase of school buses, among others.

Mrs Museveni was in the Acholi region to mobilise parents to feed their children with nutritious meals at home and pack a midday meal for the school-going children last week.

She urged parents to report to the relevant authorities any extra costs that are imposed by the schools, without the authorisation of either the permanent secretary, chief administrative officer or the town clerk.

The First Lady also said parents must consent to the charges, the figure and period should also be known.

"Additional charges must not be perpetual. They have to be for a fixed time," she said, citing a situation where parents continue paying a charge for 'purchase of a school bus', even long after the bus has been acquired.

The education minister commended Gulu district local government for coming up with their school feeding policy. She, however, suggested that the best and affordable option was for parents to pack food for their children. She said a packed meal from home enables the parent to feed their children on a preferred and nutritious food, instead of a routine diet, such as posho or cassava with beans, prepared by the schools using the compulsory contributions by parents, the Gulu district policy proposes.

The minister assured parents that the provision of a midday meal for their children, while at school, is in



Mrs Museveni cutting a cake with the staff of Mega FM in Gulu after her radio programme last week

line with the Education Act and would help improve the school retention, the child's attention span and the academic performance. Article 13, 2 (C) of the Education Act, 2008 gives parents and guardians the responsibility to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care and transport for pupils in Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools.

Mrs Museveni said parents who refuse to pack food for their school-going children had a mindset problem and urged the political leaders, religious and cultural leaders, together with the Mother's Union and the Catholic Women Association and other leaders to mobilise parents to ensure that their children have a midday meal while at school. She also requested them to continuously educate the communities about nutritious feeding for their families and encourage them to grow

vegetables and fruits in their backyard gardens to ensure they have a balanced diet.

The First Lady appealed to men to join the women in fulfilling their responsibility of caring for their families and ensuring they access basic needs of shelter, food, clothing and healthcare.

Mrs Museveni commended the management and staff of Mega FM for mobilising communities about the school feeding and nutrition.

Kule Baritazale, a commissioner in the ministry's directorate of education standards, said it was inappropriate for Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) schools to introduce extra charges for parents, which he said had contributed to the increasing school dropout rates.

"No charges should be levied without the permission of the permanent

secretary. We appeal to schools' management and boards to internalise the UPE and USE policies," he said.

He also assured the people of Acholi that grant-aided community schools would remain open.

Other issues discussed were the closing of all unlicensed schools, construction of secondary schools in sub-counties that don't have any, construction of staff houses, rehabilitation of traditional schools and the policy shift in duration of certificate courses from one to two years.

She was accompanied by Grace Freedom Kwiwucwiny (state minister for northern Uganda), Dr Joyce Moriku Kaducu (state minister for primary healthcare), Ojara Martin Mapenduzi (Gulu district chairperson) and Vincent Ochieng (Gulu district education officer).

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■ She urged parents to report to the relevant authorities any extra costs that are imposed by the schools, without the authorisation of either the permanent secretary, the chief administrative officer or the town clerk.

■ Parents must consent to extra charges, the figure and the payment period should be known.

GUIDELINES