



Play time. Pupils of Kampala School of the Physically Handicapped in Mengo during their sports day. Such schools are in short supply in the country. PHOTOS BY RACHEL MABALA

# Pledge to build school for disabled 6 years overdue

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## THE PROMISE:

In the 2011 election manifesto, the ruling National Resistance Movement promised to set up one more secondary school for persons with disabilities (PWDs).

In the document, the NRM party boasted that it had built and completed three secondary schools for PWDs, these being one for the deaf, which is located in Wakiso, one for the visually impaired located in Mukono, and one for the physically handicapped located in Gulu.

To further strengthen what had so far been achieved, the document said, "The NRM Government will construct the fourth Special Needs Education regional school".

Ms Helen Grace Asamo, MP for PWDs in eastern Uganda, says that since the idea had been to ensure that each region would have at least one special needs education school, it was assumed that the fourth school would be located

in either eastern or western Uganda. Central and northern regions had after all already been taken care of.

In the run up to last year's general elections, the party once again boasted of having constructed Salaama and Lalo primary schools in Wakiso and Lira districts respectively and Mbale and Wakiso Secondary Schools for the deaf.

## 2011

**YEAR WHEN NRM CAMPAIGN  
 MANIFESTO PROMISED TO SET UP  
 ONE MORE SECONDARY SCHOOL  
 FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES  
 (PWDs).**

The party once again promised to "progressively revamp four regional institutions for PWDs - Salaama Primary School, Mbale SS, Wakiso SS and Lalo Primary School and also introduce marketable courses for them".

It also promised to "operationalise the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy to improve accessibility, retention and completion rates of children with disabilities in education".

The government has over the years enacted laws, such as the Uganda National Institute of Special Education Act of 1995, which occasioned the creation of the Special Needs Education (SNE) and the Persons With Disability Act of 2006, which are aimed at ensuring that children with disability access education, but despite the existence of such elaborate laws the realization of the right to education for PWD children remains a huge challenge.

School enrolment levels among children with disabilities remain very low. According to a 2010 report from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics,

40,000 children with disabilities start school every year, but only about 1,200 complete their primary education.

The 2010/11-2014/15 National Development Plan (NDP) says that about 1.3 million children of school-going age require special needs education.

At the same time, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had an annual report published a little later indicated that only about 5 per cent, about 65,000 PWD children in Uganda access education in regular schools, while 10 per cent, about 130,000 access education through special schools.

Figures from the Ministry of Education indicate that there are 138 special needs education schools in the country, 49 specialise in the teaching of children with hearing impairments, 38 teach children with intellectual impairments, 43 teach those with visual impairments, while eight specialise in teaching of children with physical impairments.

All Uganda's more than 21,000 government aided schools are however structured in such a way that they can admit children with special education needs.

Some of the challenges that occasioned this pathetic state of affairs include inappropriate teaching materials, lack of qualified special needs' teachers, stigma and discrimination and lack of appropriate toilet facilities.

The promises were therefore partially aimed at addressing the challenges that precipitated the high levels of illiteracy and dropout rates among PWD children, but now more than six years since they were first made, the promised school is yet to be constructed and the education system has not been tweaked to address some of the factors that inhibit their stay in

**IMPACT**

Despite the failure to follow through its promise, government has in recent times taken a few more deliberate steps aimed at triggering an increase in the number of PWD children enrolling for education by increasing funding to some of the special needs' schools.

Whereas the ministry ordinarily provides schools under the Universal Secondary Education with a capitation grant of only Shs 41,000 per child per term, special needs education schools are given grants of up to Shs 414,000 per child per term.

The money, he said, meets the costs of providing them with boarding facilities and other requirements associated with special needs education. That money is provided to at least 4 schools.

At the same time, he said, some schools such as Mbale School for the Deaf has since been equipped with facilities to enable it provide vocational education. To that end, he said, it has had electricity connected, a workshop and dormitories constructed. He said that enrolment has since gone up.

Nevertheless, the number of PWD children accessing education especially in the schools implementing the inclusive education policy remains low.

In most cases, most of the schools offering inclusive education do not have the levels of skilling required to facilitate the learning of PWD children. Where there might be some trained teachers, other challenges such as inappropriate toilet facilities and lack of PWD ramps on most of the school buildings remain.

Matters are not helped by the very high cost of assistive devices such guides and helpers, which are way out of reach for most PWD children as most of them come from impoverished families.

One of the biggest challenges has been a reduction in budgetary allocations to the education sector. Ms Janet Museveni, the Minister for Education who is also wife to the President recently complained that allocations had been on the decline in the last four years.

In February while appearing before the Parliamentary Committee on Education, Mrs Museveni revealed that the budget had fallen from 15 per cent of the Budget in financial year 2010/2011 to about 11 per cent of the Budget in the last financial year.

The Ministry's Permanent Secretary, Mr Alex Kakooza, who was also appearing before the same committee backed her up saying that, "in Financial Year 2013/2014, we had 15.05 per cent of the budget but in financial year 2016/2017, we are running on 11.08 per cent of the Budget", adding that the ministry has in this financial year, 2017/2018, been allocated about Shs 2.6 trillion leaving Shs 465 billion in

unfunded priorities.

The cuts in budgetary allocations meant that there were shortfalls in what was meant to have been allocated towards the special needs education.

Financing of special needs education is usually less than 1 per cent of the education sector budget. The lowest was 0.33 per cent which was allocated to the section in the period between the financial years 2010/11 and 2012/13. Those allocations contravened the provision of the Disability Act of 2006, which recommends an allocation of at least 10 per cent of the education sector's entire budget allocation.

**Official explanation**

**M**r Derrick Namisi, an economist in the ministry of Education, says that the school was never worked and that it is not on the list of about one thousand presidential pledges and promises that have since been captured and kept in the Ministry's database.

"Even if it is contained in the manifesto there must be a formal communication informing the Ministry (of Education and Sports) about it. The communication has never been made. That perhaps explains why it is has never been worked on," he says.



Talented. A pupil displaying his drawing skills.



Like this. An instructor instructs a pupil on using a computer.

**Voices**



"The budget leaves a critical gap of Shs 465 billion for unfunded priorities, which in turn affects my plans and vision for the Education and Sports sector. Support the sector for additional funds to ensure the sector's vision, mission and objectives are realised as we are affected by the budget cuts."

**MS JANET MUSEVENI,**  
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION  
AND SPORTS



"A pledge can only be worked on if it has been communicated to the Ministry and when the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning has provided the required finances. While it is indeed contained in the manifesto, no communication was sent to the line Ministry and the finances were not released to the Ministry of Education so the school cannot be worked on."

**UNDERSECRETARY FINANCE  
AND ADMINISTRATION IN  
OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER**



"Nothing has ever been done to have the school constructed. The Ministry of Education and Sports did not pick it up and much as we have been trying to push for it to be constructed our hands are tied. Right now I hear they are concentrating on introducing vocational education in Mbale Secondary School for the Deaf, but that has also brought its own complications."

**MS HELEN GRACE ASAMO,**  
MP (NRM) FOR PWDs IN  
EASTERN UGANDA



"That was the president's idea, but I think it was affected by the Ministry's decision to introduce the policy of inclusive education. The challenge though is that there are very few special needs' education teachers in those schools implementing the policy. Already there had been a challenge of teachers in the original 18 special education schools. The problem has now been exacerbated."

**WILSON WILLIAM  
NKURACH, MP  
(INDEPENDENT) PWDs IN  
NORTHERN UGANDA**

**Daily Monitor position**

It is vitally important that government commits more resources to the education sector as

is to take place in especially the special needs schools.

