There is lack of teacher commitment on account of remuneration

Why eastern schools are at the bottom of the log

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He adds: "In schools where there is a strict supervision of schools involving the Government, community leaders and parents, there has been discernible improvement. What also lies at the root of the poor performance, Mugoya adds, has been the lack of parental involvement in schools they send their children to."

"Some parents have detached themselves from supporting schools where their children study. Some send their children to school without scholastic materials and without meals. A child cannot excel under such circumstances," Mugoya adds.

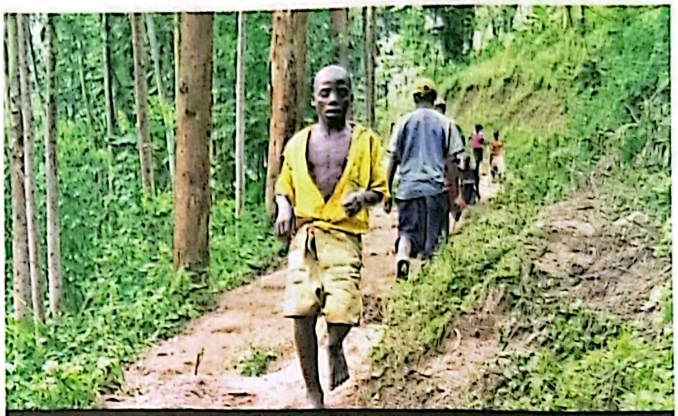
Mataṇda says the poor performance persists because there is barely any supervision of teachers, especially in the UPE schools.

"Teachers report for duty at their convenience and spot checks have been done that prove this. Teacher motivation is low because of meagre salaries," Mataṇda adds.

Betty Khainza, the district education officer for Bududa, says despite the underperformance in Bududa, there was a silver lining.

"The percentage pass rate in division one in Bududa may have declined if parallels are to be drawn with 2016, however, the pass rate in the rest of the divisions in 2017 has improved.

"The general performance in 2017 was better. In 2016, the district had 643 failures, which was 23% while in 2017, the percentage reduced to 16.6%," Khainza adds.



Children go to school under difficult conditions. Photo by Richard Wetaya

Hard-to-reach

In the far-flung and hilly Bududa areas such as Bufuma, Buraba and Nabono, where some government-aided primary schools are located, deployment of teachers by the Bududa district education office, has been a tall order.

Khainza, however, says with a teaching staff deficit of 215 teachers, Bududa may still face long odds in performance improvement in the future.

"Most schools in the district operate without the required number of teachers because of this deficit. A teacher to pupil ratio of 1:101, which is the current status quo in the district, is not ideal. Having few teachers means those available are often hard pressed in finishing the syllabus," she says.

The Government recommended teacher pupil ratio is 1 teacher to 45 pupils.

Simon Makoma, the headteacher of Buwali Primary School in Bududa says the lack of teachers and the lack of commitment showed by those still teaching explains why the region is still performing poorly.

"The lack of teachers is an issue of concern for Bududa and the education ministry should look into it. There is also lack of teacher commitment on account of remuneration. The teachers who are invariably absent from school are complicit in this continued underperformance," Makoma says.

Godfrey Wamboya, a teacher in Mbale, echoes Makoma's point; attributing the problem to teacher understaffing.

"Under staffing impacts on the teacher-pupil relationship and the upshot will always be poor performance," Wamboya notes.

In the far-flung and hilly areas of Bududa such as Bufuma, Buraba and Nabono, where some government-aided primary schools are located, deployment of teachers and other staff by the Bududa district education office has been a tall order.

"It is a challenge for a teacher to move to those hard-to-reach areas and still give a good account of his or her performance, even with the additional allowance from the Government for such teachers. It has had a direct bearing on the poor performance of our learners in those areas," Khainza says.

Alisa Bukwali, the headteacher of Bukhanyenze Primary School in Bududa, also notes that negative work attitudes showed by some teachers have exacerbated the problem and contributed to the decline in performance.

"The problems of teacher mobility and the lack of commitment by some teachers are caused by low remuneration, among other factors. The low remuneration coupled with a heavy work overload due to inadequate teachers often dampens the efficiency of teachers," Bukwali says.

WAY OUT

Isaac Mataṇda, an education official says for Mbale and Bududa to compete favourably with the rest of the country, the issue of teacher inefficiency will have to be addressed.

"Teacher motivation is an all-time low in many schools in both districts. A motivated teacher is crucial to a successful classroom performance. A better remuneration and incentives package for teachers is what is needed," he says.

"The school heads too should motivate their teachers. Good performing teachers need to always be commended and thanked by their supervisors."

Khainza says her office is working on intensifying monitoring, supervision and inspection visits to schools.

"Monitoring, inspection and supervisory visits to schools are going to be a matter of urgency. The plan is to have engagements with other stakeholders such as parents and community leaders to sensitise them on their roles in elevating the standards of performance in our schools. We also plan to strengthen the 'reward and function system' in the various schools under the Universal Primary Education in the district," Khainza says.

The Mbale municipality inspectorate of schools is also planning similar solutions, according to Mugoya.

"Monitoring and inspection visits to schools are going to be intensified. There are going to be monthly follow-up visits to ensure that teachers are on duty and are doing their job as required," Mugoya says.

Ministry's view

State minister for higher education John Muyingo says eastern Uganda is one of the areas where inspection of schools has to be tightened.

"All local governments are expected to work around the clock to make sure that their schools are supervised," he says.

