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Ranking. According to the global ranking, less than 30 per cent of Ugandan pupils complete primary school.

BY STEPHEN KAFEERO
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KAMPALA. Less than half of the close to two million children who enrolled in Primary One in 2010 completed their primary education in the Primary Leaving Education (PLE) exams released yesterday.

Using Ministry of Education and Sports data contained in the Statistical Abstracts issued by Uganda Bureau of Statics, *Saturday Monitor* has tracked the progress of the would-be 2017 PLE candidates from the time they enrolled with results showing a huge gap between those who joined the system and those that were able to complete the seven-year cycle.

In 1997, Uganda became one of the first African countries to introduce Universal Primary Education (UPE) with the aim of ensuring that as many children as possible complete primary school, but based on the government's own data, the dream is still distant.

There is no data on how many children were eligible to join primary school at the time this cohort enrolled in primary school seven years ago.

In 2011, 1,839,714 pupils enrolled in Primary One. Of these 923,089 were males and 916,625 females. Seven years later, only 646,080 pupils sat for PLE exams. Of these 312,585 were male and 333,495 female.

This means 610,504 boys and 583,130 girls either dropped out, are still caught up in the system or passed away along the way. The other reason could be "ghost" pupils recorded in the system.

School dropouts

At the lower level, the numbers also suggest that both boys and girls drop out of school at an almost equal number.

Globally, Uganda has consistently been ranked among countries with the lowest proportion of children staying in school up to Primary Seven, with less than 30 per cent completing primary school.

The completion rate in Kenya is at 84 per cent, Tanzania 81 per cent and Rwanda 74 per cent.

Some of the contributing factors include early pregnancies, hidden costs even in cases where the parents don't have to pay. Costs such as school meals, scholastic materials and uniforms can keep pupils away. Teachers' absenteeism also plays a critical role.

According to a report by Twaweza Uganda, an education advocacy agency, "27 per cent of Ugandan children are not in school at any given moment despite free universal education. And it appears pupil drop-out is on the rise. Surprisingly, despite these dramatic figures, no routine data is available on pupil and teacher attendance."

2017 PLE: More than 1 million left behind



The stars. (Left to Right) Patricia Achlengi, Abubaker Matovu, Amina Mirembe, Cathy Nankya, Deborah Nassali and Elizabeth Nabukenya of Light Primary School Bulenga celebrate after scoring Aggregate 4 each. PHOTO BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU



“The bottom line is that teachers, parents, District Education Officers, the ministry and other stakeholders have to play their part to end this.”

DR YUSUF NSUBUGA, THE FORMER DIRECTOR OF BASIC EDUCATION

A 2014 UNESCO report recommended a need for "greater analysis and more evidence-informed planning to reach excluded children" with a goal "to ensure that all children, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances, are in school, and learning."

A "Pre-primary and Primary Education in Uganda: Access, Cost, Quality and Relevance" study by the National Planning Authority put the survival rate in school of a particular cohort across the primary cycle at 33 per cent. The NPA analysis was also based on Ministry of Education data.

"Low efficiency in primary education is manifested by a larger number of factors that include among others high head-teacher and teacher absenteeism, high pupil absen-

teeism, dropout and repetition, large proportion of out-of-school children, low teacher utilisation rates; dysfunctional district service commissions, and high teacher attrition rates, limited access to pre-primary education and institutionalised phenomenon of "ghost" (i.e. "ghosts" schools, teachers and learners)," the study notes.

Ms Connie Alezuyo, an educationist, says a number of factors come in to play to explain the number of those who join and those who are able to complete.

Ms Alezuyo says both boys and girls are at par and what is required of them is almost the same. She notes that as they grow up, the demands on the girls become more with many especially in rural areas required to stay away from school doing house chores among other challenges.

The other factor is the structure of the curriculum. From Primary One to three, the pupils undergo a thematic curriculum where they are taught using the local languages but this changes after.

"If that transition is not well managed, many children drop out or fail to progress from Primary Four on wards because of the difficulty to cope with the new challenges," she says.

Other factors she says have to do with the teachers, families and their commitment to supporting the learners.

"There can be a huge difference in terms of outcomes in a normal UPE school and another one with a project. In a school with a project, the teachers are assessed on what they do,

there is monitoring and general supervision. I have been in schools in Nwoya with children studying under a tree but doing better than those with classrooms and other amenities," she says.

Dr Yusuf Nsubuga, the former Director of Basic Education at the Ministry of Education, says: "The bottom line is that teachers, parents, District Education Officers, the ministry and other stakeholders have to play their part to end this."

PLE CANDIDATES

2011 (PRIMARY ONE)

Male: 923,089

Female: 916,625

Total: 1,839,714

2012 (PRIMARY TWO)

Male: 642,732

Female: 641,390

Total: 1,284,122

2013 (PRIMARY THREE)

Males: 656,110

Females: 656,482

Total: 1,312,592

2014 (PRIMARY FOUR)

Males: 673,677

Females: 685,771

Total: 1,359,448

2015 (PRIMARY FIVE)

Males: 541,290

Females: 560,408

Total: 1,101,698

2016 (PRIMARY SIX)

Males: 466,660

Females: 491,638

Total: 958,298

2017 (PRIMARY SEVEN)

Males: 312,585

Females: 333,495

Total: 646,080