Left out. Authorities observe that the withdrew of the support programme has left some students in remote areas stranded as there are few or no government schools

Why freeze on USE funding has left hundreds out of school

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BUSOGA. The number of students joining Senior One in schools across Busoga Sub-region has gradually dropped following the phasing out of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in private schools early this year, a *Daily Monitor* mini-survey has revealed.

In January, the Ministry of Education announced plans to stop funding 792 private secondary schools which have been implementing the USE programme under Public Private Partnership (PPP). Only continuing students are still being supported until they complete Senior Four.

Daily Monitor visited a number of schools, including Kityerera Peas High School in Wandegeya Village, Kityerera Sub-county in Mayuge District - which has been implementing the programme.

"When you look at our enrolment figures of last year, we had 205 Senior One students but the number has declined to 171. This year, we had expected to have a total of more than 800 students but because of the phasing out of USE (in Senior One), the number has reduced to 588," Mr Albert Ondonyi, the school director, said.



Staying on. Some of the students of Sarah Ntiiro High School in Mayuge District where government has been implementing the USE programme . PHOTO BY TAUSI NAKATO

No fees

Mr Ondonyi said most children have dropped out of school because their parents cannot afford the fees yet government-aided schools are very few in the area and require some students to travel long distances.

The head teacher of Sarah Ntiiro High School in Kavule Village, Mayuge Town Council, Mr Anthony Muyego, said the phasing out of the programme will increase the number of uneducated people, especially in remote areas where there are no government-aided secondary schools.

"People in this community are financially incapacitated; even some of those who are USE beneficiaries cannot afford to contribute lunch fee at school. Most parents have been embracing it although the enrolment at A Level is still very low because in Senior Four, we have 43 candidates this year while in Senior Six we only have 14," Mr Muyego said.

The Parents Teachers Association chairperson of Glory land Christian College in Mpumudde Division in Jinja District, Mr Moses Lwokyaza, said most of the pupils have started dropping out at Primary Seven since their hopes to join Senior One have dwindled.

Organisation affected

The country director of Promoting Equality in African Schools, a charity organisation, Mr Henry Senkasi, said although their aim is to ensure affordability of secondary education to all students, they might increase the fees to fill the gap after the USE withdrawal.

"We are looking at the option of how we can fill the gap regarding the loss of income and harmonise early next month," Mr Senkasi said.

Since 2007, government has been paying Shs47,000 per student, per term, for those accessing free education in these schools against their counterparts in government-aided schools implementing USE and Business Technical and Vocational Education Training Institutions which receive Shs41,000 and Shs150,000 per student, respectively.

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Funds

Government has been spending Shs52b annually to support students in private schools.

It is now planning to use the funds to construct 88 government schools annually across 243 sub-counties.

Mr James Tweheyo, an educationist, told *Daily Monitor* that phasing out the programme is in order provided the funds are used to consolidate government-aided schools which face challenges.

"The money that government has been 'dumping' in these schools would have been used in building capacity of government-aided schools. By the time of withdrawing the funding, these schools would have stocks of textbooks and science equipment," Mr Tweheyo said.

He said he is not aware whether government has also been monitoring the use of funds in private schools which have been implementing the programme.

Ministry officials argue that the government has built capacity over the years in areas where they did not have any government-aided schools and are now ready to absorb those students in these institutions, adding that this, however, will be done in phases.

Cause

Meanwhile, leaders in Namayingo District have attributed the rise in school dropout rates to fishing and gold mining.

The district education officer, Mr Kawo Kawerenayi, said the availability of water bodies and gold mining across the area is fuelling school dropout rate.

"School-going children in Rabachi, Sigulu, Dolwe, Hama, Nanponge Islands and other areas have resorted to fishing. We blame the 85 per cent school dropout rates on parents who are teaching their children how to fish instead of sending them to schools," Mr Kawerenayi told *Daily Monitor*.

The Namayingo deputy Resident District Commissioner, Mr Henry Kitambula, said parents have failed to utilise the few schools in the area.

"An 85 per cent school dropout rate is a big threat to the district. If we continue having many pupils dropping out of school, it means we shall only have illiterate fishermen doing illegal fishing on our lakes," Mr Kitambula said.

The Bukooli Member of Parliament, Mr Abott Ouma, faulted government for failing to construct good schools and putting up a conducive learning environment in the remote areas of the Island.

BACKGROUND

In 2014, President Museveni directed the Education ministry to stop supporting PPP [Public Private Partnership] schools. The letter addressed to the then Education minister, Ms Jessica Alupo, indicated that the money which was being spent on the schools could be used to construct 88 government schools annually in 243 sub-counties.

"A lot of government money is squandered in supporting private secondary schools under USE. What a waste all these years," President Museveni wrote on December 24, 2013.

"The best way is not supporting the new admissions in Senior One next year until, in four years, when this donation to private secondary schools stops completely," the President added.

Following the directive, the ministry set up a committee to investigate the implications of implementing the decision.

The report showed that phasing out of PPP schools will not result in significant savings to build the then required schools (6,580 classrooms) to accommodate all USE enrollment at the current levels.

"If all students who would have enrolled in PPP schools enroll in government schools, Shs6,000 would be saved on each student per term, resulting in Shs19b over the four years, enough for only 30 schools at a rate of Shs660 million each," reads the report in part.

The report recommended a partial case by case phase-out of PPP schools as government gradually builds more schools.