

Zimbabwe to adopt Uganda's university access model

BY JANE NAFULA

KAMPALA. Zimbabwe is set to replicate Uganda's Higher Education Access Certificate (HEAC) Programme to expand university access for students who fail to meet direct entry requirements, particularly those from disadvantaged and rural schools.

The visiting Permanent Secretary in Zimbabwe's Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, Prof Fanual Tagwira, said the programme had impressed a delegation of education officials and university leaders during a benchmarking visit to Uganda.

Prof Tagwira led a 20-member team comprising officials from the Forum African Women Educationists Zimbabwe (FAWEZI), Zimbabwe's higher education ministry, and representatives from Chinhoyi University of Technology, Midlands State University, National University of Science and Technology, and Bindura University of Science Education.

The delegation was in Uganda from May 4 to 9 to study the implementation of the HEAC programme.

"We had a very good experience. We spoke to students, lecturers and officials from the National Council for Higher Education and analysed what they are teaching here," Prof Tagwira said.

"We want to replicate the programme because in our country many young people get only one principal pass and fail to access university education. Most come from remote schools where they lacked laboratories, textbooks and learning materials," he added.

Under Uganda's HEAC programme, students who do not attain the minimum grades for direct university admission undertake a one-year bridging course before progressing to degree or diploma programmes.

The Executive Director of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), Prof Mary Okwakol, said the programme targets Senior Six leavers who score less than two principal passes at the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education level.

"It is a bridge to higher education institutions. A student may wish to study medicine but fail to qualify directly. If they perform well in the bridging programme, they can later pursue degree courses," she said.

According to NCHE, more than 7,000 students have enrolled under the programme, with female students accounting for 44 percent of the enrolment.

Prof Okwakol, however, cited funding constraints as a major challenge affecting access and completion rates.

Prof Tagwira said Zimbabwe was also exploring alternative financing models, including work-for-fees arrangements where students work at universities in exchange for tuition support.

"We have more than 4,000 students under the work-for-fees programme. Our philosophy is that no one should be left behind because of lack of school fees," he said.