

PEOPLE WERE MISINFORMED, BUT NOW WE HAVE EXPLAINED TO THEM AND WE EXPECT A CHANGE

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FIRST LADY CONCLUDES SCHOOL FEEDING CAMPAIGN

After a six-week tour around the country sensitising parents about feeding their school-going children, the First Lady, Mrs Janet Museveni, has announced the end of her campaign.

Mrs Museveni, who is also the education minister, embarked on a countrywide assessment of the programme on April 24. She featured on radio talk shows and held meetings with leaders, visited and commissioned schools. She also inspected technical institutions, nursing schools and universities for monitoring purposes.

Addressing journalists at State House, Nakasero on Friday, Mrs Museveni maintained that parents had a duty to feed school-going children as the Government offers free education.

"Education is a shared responsibility between the Government and communities," the minister said. "My campaign was intended to sensitise and re-awaken the public awareness about the parents' role in educating their children."

However, she acknowledged that some families still find it hard to meet basic needs and parents are reluctant to pack food for their children, which she blamed on misinformation.

"Initially, people were misinformed. Some leaders told people that the Government would provide food for pupils," she explained. "But we have



PHOTO BY MARIA WAMALA

First Lady Janet Museveni displays containers that she advised parents to use to pack food for their children. This was during a press briefing at State House Nakasero on Friday

now explained this to the parents and we expect a change."

The six-week campaign, she said, was about correcting the mixed messages on school feeding.

Studies show that children who are hungry are unable to concentrate

in class, leading to poor learning outcomes.

The First Lady, however, noted that some parents were reluctant to provide meals to their children due to selfishness, citing low-cost alternatives for carrying the meals.

"This container costs sh2,000. I was told that in some communities, men spend at least sh1,000 on alcohol. Can't men sacrifice taking alcohol for two days to buy a container that will take a child for a year?" she asked.

The minister said if the parents catered for meals, it would allow the Government to focus on core areas of education.

The First Lady also used the campaign to monitor service delivery and commission new classrooms in 54 schools constructed with support from the Global Partnership for Education, as part of the \$100m grant.

"Out of the 138 primary schools to be built across the country with the grant, 54 schools have been completed, while the remaining 83 will be ready by December," the education ministry's permanent secretary, Alex Kakooza, said.

During the tour, Mrs Museveni also visited a number of technical institutes and colleges including, Kisoro, Amelo, Moroto, Madera and Elgon technical institutes.

She said: "Although construction at these institutions is progressing, there are challenges that have to be addressed such as delayed project completion by contractors and

inadequate staff."

The other problems she cited include limited power supply in the workshops, land encroachment, low enrolment, poor students' performance and the sorry state of some facilities.

As part of the Skilling Uganda programme, she said: "The education ministry will undertake activities to accelerate the training, development and building of capacity for the youth in the informal sector."

The First Lady also revealed that her ministry was preparing to roll out sexuality education in schools to teach children to be responsible and vigilant in the face of rising threats to morality.

"The recently launched National Framework on Sexuality Education was a response to three challenges faced by young people," she said.

Among the challenges, she cited the growing sexual reproductive health problems, including HIV/AIDS; the increasing influence of mass media dominated by foreign values and the breakdown of traditional and cultural structures.

"In Africa, discussing sexuality was taboo. However, parents had more time with their children. Now, mothers spend more time at work, while the children are under the care of maids, TV and the Internet. The messages they get from all those sources are dangerous," she said.

Sexuality education in schools has been at a pilot scale and not well-guided since most of the initiatives have been NGO-led and not designed for the Ugandan context, she said.