

# Where's the promised UPE capitation grant?

BY NICHOLAS WASSAJJA

When Cissy Namugga Nsereko joined St Bruno Sserunkuma Primary School, Ssaza in Masaka municipality as the headteacher in 2015, she found a pupil enrolment total of 250, a number which has more than doubled since. Although the Government, in the 2016/17 financial year, increased the capitation grant for pupils under Universal Primary Education from sh7,560 to sh10,000, the enrolment upsurge in Namugga's school, has not been reciprocated with an increase in the capitation grant.

She says in 2016, each of her pupils was allocated sh2,500, sh2,050 and sh2,900 for the first, second and third terms respectively, a situation she says applies to the rest of the schools in Masaka district, regardless of whether their pupil population increases or not. This has left many schools struggling to thrive.

Namugga adds that over time, as headteachers, they have lost track of the exact amount allocated to each pupil, since the figure keeps changing.

"The monthly reports to the districts are supposed to assist in planning for matters such as the capitation grants, but our data proves useless, since it never tallies with the amount we receive," she explains.

However, Namugga adds that as headteachers, they have been deployed in the schools as managers, whose daily task is to find solutions to challenges.

She said: "With or without the capitation grant, parents have entrusted us with the future of their children; we plan with them to top up allowances for teachers or recruit more staff and can decide to cut on a certain percentage that the capitation grant is meant to cover, say administrative costs or the number of co-curricular activities. We always find a way to manage."

Namugga's dilemma is not an isolated case. The mismatch between capitation grant and pupil population sweeps through thousands of public primary schools all over the country.

For another headteacher, John Paul Mugwanya of St John Paul Mugwanya Complex Primary School in Masaka, even after the increase to sh10,000, he says it is not enough.

"If somebody promised to educate your child at sh20,000 per year, would you be happy? I would be extremely worried about the type of education my child is going to receive."

He also points out that the delay in sending capitation grant worsens the already demoralised teachers and pupils. "You need money to



Pupils of St Mary's Primary School in Holima municipality. UPE schools receive only slightly above half the funding that was pledged by the Government

run a school, but there are times when the school does not have any," he adds.

Schools are not receiving the right amount of capitation grant to tally with their growing pupil population. More so, schools are only receiving slightly above half as much as was promised by the Government.

#### Ministry responds

The state minister for primary education, Rosemary Seninde, agrees that since the capitation grant increased, the



A well-tended Buhinga Primary School in Fort Portal. Despite challenges in funding, Seninde notes that it is the role of headteachers to use the available resources well to keep UPE schools afloat

Government is yet to provide the sh10,000 per pupil, which she attributes to data challenges.

She said: "It is true we are giving less than budgeted for because we planned using an old population data of pupils, yet we were supposed to cater for all the children, so we decided to give a little to each of them as we sort out the hurdle."

She also admitted that the limited capitation grant has serious implications on the learners.

"The money runs the schools and there are many activities that have to be done. It is used to buy supplementary reading materials, repairing and replacing broken desks and to fund co-curricular activities,

among others," Seninde said.

The government policy is to compute capitation grants based on school enrollment with each pupil getting sh10,000 annually. The expenditure guidelines indicate that, 50% of the grant is supposed to be used on instructional materials; 30% on co-curricular activities (sports, music, dance and drama) and 20% on school management and administration.

Seninde, however, notes that in the absence of enough money to fund the schools' activities, "headteachers have to cut on the number of these activities because they (headteachers) decide how to use that money."

But the ministry's undersecretary for finance

and administration, Aggrey Kibenge, says giving schools money that is below the new capitation grant structure has been caused by the inadequate release from the finance ministry.

He added that the ministry presents the budget framework papers at the beginning of each financial year, with a list of pupils and money required to pay for them, but capitation funds released to school managers do not correspond with the numbers.

#### The budget

"We even have special inter-ministerial meetings, during which we present these issues, but the problem is that the Government's resources are limited," Kibenge said.

The budget framework paper for the financial year 2018/19 shows that the education sector has proposed a sh2.7 trillion budget compared to sh2.8 trillion that was approved in the current financial year, up from sh2.4 trillion that was allocated in 2016/17, when capitation grants were increased.

The 2016/17 financial year reports indicate that the total universal primary education capitation grant budget was about sh68b for 7,242,902 pupils, but the actual expenditure was about sh66b, which means 7,028,163 pupils were catered for.

The merger budget share for capitation grant means the education ministry has to use the available little money to pay for all pupils, which creates variability in the unit cost for each pupil because enrolment figures change every year.

#### No faithful stewards?

Much as the education ministry is not receiving all the funds it requires for running free primary education, for the last half a decade, it is one of the ministries that has been receiving the lion's share of the national budget.

However, this is not to say local leaders and headteachers present a clean bill of health on the staggering quality of free primary education. For example, the Auditor General's report of 2016/17 points out gross mismanagement of contracts for infrastructure development in a host primary schools in Ma district.

## Just how much has UPE achieved?

The Masaka district woman representative and a private educationist, Mary Babirye Kabanda, says UPE is a brilliant idea that would have gone a long way in eradicating illiteracy, but it was ruined by politics.

"Primary school graduates can barely write their names and some are dropping out because they have not seen any usefulness in the programme. We have hardly moved towards eradicating illiteracy, if not retrogressed," she added.

She said those responsible for holding technocrats and headteachers accountable in the district systems do not because of



Mary Babirye

fear for their elective positions.

She added that the same goes for the parents.

"We, the politicians, created an impression in parents that the duty of educating children had shifted to the state and that their responsibility was reducing to producing babies," she said.

According to Babirye, besides the minimal funding, emphasis should as well shift from the amount of money to how every little penny is used.