

Learners at govt schools should pay extra fees - Bugisu leaders

The Bugisu leaders say the government should allow schools to collect small, affordable fees from parents to sustain proper learning.

BY FRED WAMBEDE & ANDREW WABUSHENDA

Charging of extra fees in government-aided schools in Bugisu Sub-region has attracted mixed reactions, with a section of leaders saying it is necessary to enable schools to improve academic performance.

This comes at the backdrop of the ongoing crackdown on illegal fees in government schools in Bugisu Sub-region by the State House Anti-Corruption Unit.

Last week, Samuel Wamimbi, the head teacher at Bumageni Army Barracks Primary School in Mbale District was arrested and interdicted. It was on allegations of collecting illegal fees in a government school, in defiance of President Museveni's directive on free education.

Rev John Wilson Nandaah, the Bishop of Mbale Diocese, condemned the arrests of the head teachers over extra fees, saying the implementers are not well informed.

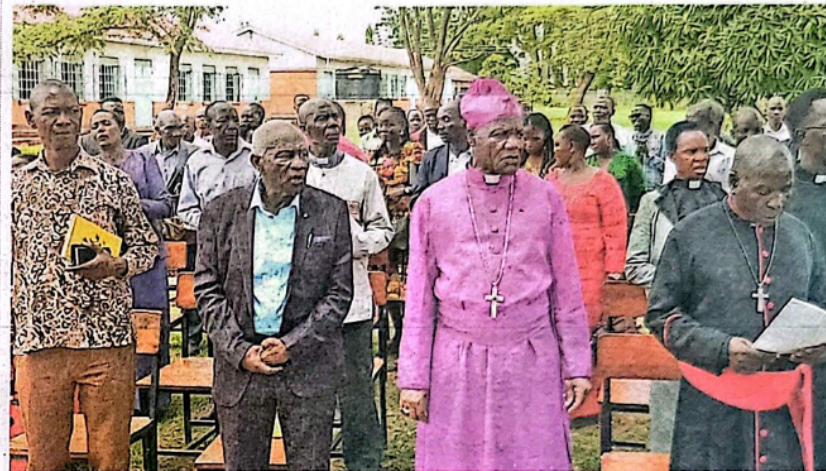
"Faith-based organisations should be allowed to charge fees to meet unmet costs until the government can fully fund education for all students," he said, adding that an agreement was reached between the government and faith-based schools to charge extra fees.

Funding

Government aided schools benefit from government support, in terms of human resource (teaching and non-teaching staff), infrastructure development, and quarterly releases of capital grants, where the government pays schools Shs20,000 per learner per year.

However, the bishop noted that many schools in rural areas face significant staffing challenges that require parental contributions to fill the gaps.

"In some cases, schools may have 50 teachers who are on the government payroll. Parental contributions help bridge this gap by enabling schools to pay non-payroll teachers and support infrastructure development," he said.



Bishop John Wilson Nandaah (2nd right), Mbale Diocese leads prayers to commission a new science laboratory at Busiu Secondary School. He is one of the leader supporting schools to charge extra fees. PHOTO/ANDREW WABUSHENDA

Rev Nandaah made the remarks during the thanksgiving ceremony held to celebrate Busiu Secondary School's strong performance in the recent examinations released by Uganda National Examination Board (UNEBC) as well as the commissioning of a new science laboratory at the weekend.

The leaders say the government should allow schools to collect small, affordable fees from parents to sustain proper learning.

Daily Monitor learnt that among the extra charges include fees for development, tests, reams of paper, feeding and weekend coaching, which charges contravene the Education Act of 2008 and the presidential directives.

Mr John Baptist Nambeshe, the Member of Parliament for Manjiya Constituency, Bududa District, revealed that for schools where parents contribute towards their children's education in government-aided institutions performance greatly improved.

He cited examples of government schools in the central region, where parents contribute significant amounts of

SCHOOL DROPOUTS

According to an analysis from the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEBC) and Education and Sports Sector Annual Performance Reports (ES-SAPRs), approximately 42.8 percent of pupils who start primary school do not complete Primary Seven. This means that almost 43 percent of pupils drop out before finishing primary school. The analysis further indicated that about 46.4 percent, female pupils drop out before completing P.7, compared to 44.2 percent for boys.

money

Mr Nambeshe noted that any fees paid by parents are agreed upon during Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, where stakeholders decide on a

reasonable amount for contribution.

"We don't support parents to pay exorbitant money in government schools but if parents agreed to pay something small, the government should allow that for the betterment of learners," he said.

Poor performance

He further observed that the Bugisu region, more so government aided schools still lag behind other parts of the country in terms of academic performance as evidenced in the recently released Primary Leaving Examinations. This highlights the persistent gaps in resources, supervision, and community support.

Out of 7,000 PLE candidates, 782 pupils attained Division One. Division Two and Three accounted for the majority of pupils, while 875 were in Division Four, 945 were ungraded, and 66 did not sit the exam.

Mr Kassim Namugali, the outgoing Mbale City mayor, noted that during benchmarking visits to regions such as the west and central, strong school

management and active Parent-Teacher Association involvement.

Mr Jimmy Nambiro, the head of the education desk at State House under the State House Anti-Corruption Unit while addressing head teachers at Mbale District headquarters during a meeting maintained that illegal charging of fees in government schools at both primary and secondary levels is not acceptable.

He emphasised that it is a crime for school administrators to send learners home due to failure to pay feeding money, noting that this contravenes the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy.

"If a parent cannot pay, they can still provide something for the child to eat," Mr Nambiro said.

He further stressed that schools implementing government programs such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE), and the Secondary Education Expansion and Development (SEED) program must strictly adhere to presidential directives.

Responding to the State House crackdown, Mr Namugali emphasised the need to involve local leaders and parents rather than merely issuing warnings or interdicting teachers, which he said demoralises them.

"You cannot embarrass teachers and expect them to remain motivated to teach," he said.

Mr Herbert Weboya, the head teacher of Busiu Secondary School, revealed that the improved performance in both the 2025 UACE and UCE results at the school was largely attributed to parents' contributions.

He said the school has 61 teachers, of whom only 35 are on the government payroll. "The others are paid through funds contributed by parents under the PTA arrangement," he said.

President Museveni while meeting youth leaders at Mbale Secondary School in 2024 and during his campaigns blamed the high dropout of learners in government aided schools in the country to extra charges imposed by the head teachers in connivance with Parent-Teachers Associations (PTA).