

Cause. A 2016 survey found that pupils in the district drop out due to poverty, child labour and negative attitude towards education, among others.

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LUUKA. Joan Namukobe, 15, dropped out of school when she was in Primary Four at Bugomba Primary School after her parents failed to provide her with scholastic materials and uniform.

Namukobe says going to school was "hell on earth" because she would be sent back home over lack of uniform, books and pens daily.

"I loved school and my dream was to become a doctor but my parents are poor," the third born in the family of eight, says as she weeds in one of the sugarcane plantations in Bukanga Sub-county, Luuka District.

She works with her mother from Monday to Saturday in the plantation to earn a living.

Namukobe is not alone. According to a survey conducted in 2016 by Dennis Dease Foundation [DDF], a non-governmental organisation operating in Busoga Sub-region, 55 per cent of pupils in Luuka drop out of school annually due to various factors, including extreme poverty, child labour, negative attitude towards education, illiteracy among parents, among others.

Statistics

The report also found out that out of the total number of 142,181 children in the district, 36,771 (25.86 per cent) had never been in school.

The survey was carried out in Bukanga, Bulongo, Ikumbya, Irongo, Nawampiti and Waibuga sub-counties. The district has 88 government-aided primary schools.

Ms Fazirah Barbara Mugala, the programmes coordinator, says the survey also discovered that more than 30 per cent of pupils drop out of school before reaching Primary Seven.

"This rate at which pupils are dropping out of school is worrying and it needs collective efforts from various stakeholders to cause the urgently needed change," Ms Mugala says.

Luuka is among the districts in eastern region that were ranked among the poor performers in the national examinations. The district recorded only 150 candidates in Division One in the 2017 Primary Leaving Examinations.

Ms Mugala says child labour, poverty, teenage pregnancy, community negative attitude towards education are the factors that should be tackled in order to keep pu-

55% of pupils drop out of school in Luuka - survey



Focus. Some pupils of Bugomba Primary School in Luuka District study under a tree. Parents say the un conducive learning environment causes school dropout. PHOTO BY MUDANGHA KOLYANGHA

pils in schools.

"These are the leading causes of the high rate of school dropout in the district and the children are the bearers of the burden at the end of the day," she adds.

The mayor of Luuka Town Council, Mr Patrick Wagobe, acknowledges the challenge, blaming it on sugarcane growers and parents, who have failed to play their roles.

Mr Wagobe says many children are lured out of school to offer labour in the sugarcane plantations.

He says as council, they will pass a by-law to bar growers and parents from employing children in their farms.

Most of the land in Luuka is cultivated with sugarcane plantations, which is hired by business people. This is also affected food production in the area, according to the leaders.

Mr James Byekwaso, a parent, says although parents in the area have a negative attitude towards education, the govern-

ment has also failed to equip schools with a conducive learning environment.

Parents speak out

"We have enormous challenges in this district that need urgent attention because the sanitation of the classroom is not so good. Jiggers are eating up children's feet causing a lot of discomfort while in class and this is why children are dropping out because they cannot grasp what is being taught in class," Mr Byekwaso says.

He says some of the schools are operating in dilapidated structures with no offices. This, he says, has made the UPE programme

ineffective in rural communities.

Mr Amos Weswa, another parent, says some schools lack pit-latrines while in other cases and pupils share the facilities with teachers.

"The situation prompts some children to use nearby bushes or farms to ease themselves. This and other factors also cause children to drop out of school," Mr Weswa says.

Differs on survey

The district education officer, Mr Francis Kamyuka, disagrees with the survey report, saying the school dropout has reduced by five per cent through community engagement and strengthening community policing and enforcing bylaws.

"We have made several arrests and charged children found providing labour in the sugarcane plantation, especially during school days. However, as a district, we have other challenges of poor structures that needs urgent address," Mr Kamyuka says.

"We are coming up with a strategic plan to ensure that sugarcane growers desist from employing children as well as force parents to take back their children to school," PATRICK WAGOBÉ, MAYOR OF LUUKA TOWN COUNCIL

"In some schools, they use the head teacher's office as a store for food stuff and as the main library. These are also issues which should be worked on by our government first," JAMES BYEKWASO, PARENT

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PUPILS WHO PASSED IN DIVISION ONE IN THE 2017 PLE IN LUUKA