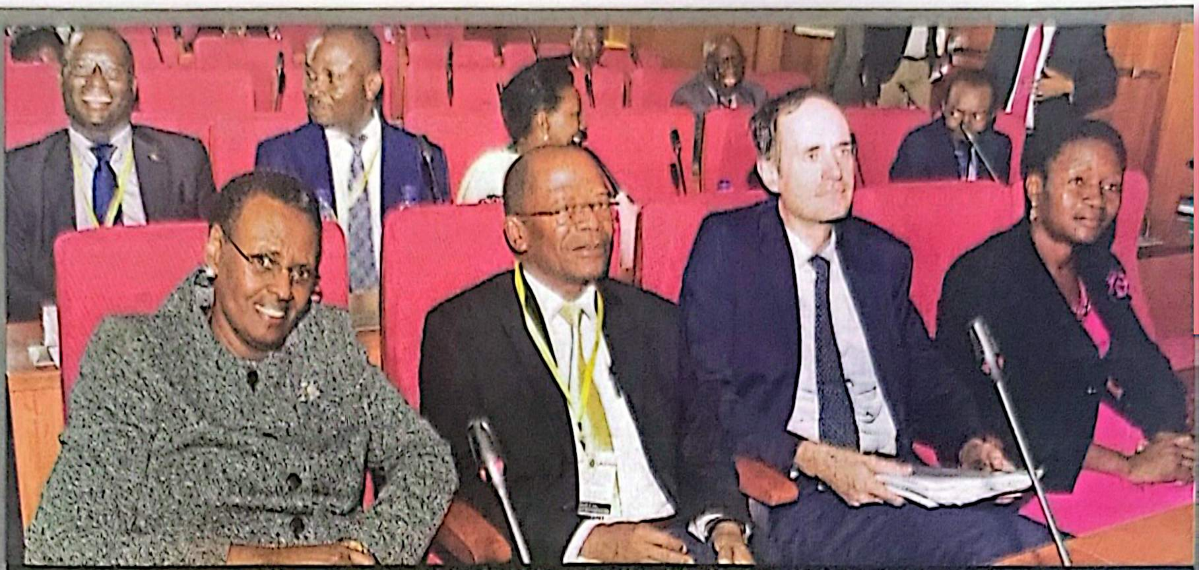

(Left-right) First Lady Janet Museveni, state minister for higher education John Muyingo, Verbist and state minister for primary education Rosemary Seninde listen to presentations during the education and sports sector review at the Office of the Prime Minister

# Education ministry scores highly on infrastructure

**By Taddeo Bwambale and Betty Amamukirori**

The education sector recorded significant growth in infrastructure and human resources over the past one year, according to the latest sector review report, which also highlights numerous hurdles.

Rising student enrolment figures, hundreds of teachers trained, new classrooms built and thousands of textbooks supplied to schools were hallmarks of the sector's performance last year.

The 2016/2017 Education and Sports Annual Performance Report unveiled yesterday captures key milestones at pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary levels.

For instance, the number of pre-primary schools increased by 18% from 5,763 in 2015/16 to 6,798 and an additional 86,790 children enrolled for pre-primary.

At primary, enrolment increased by 4.7% with 391,607 more students joining school last year. Karamoja sub-region recorded the highest percentage increase in enrolment (12%) at primary, the report shows.

At secondary level, student enrolment grew by 13% with an additional 173,269 students joining the level. A total of 1,838 new classrooms were built over the past year, the report shows.

Under Business, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (BITVET), 10 new institutions were built, bringing the figure to 129, while student numbers grew by 3.2% to 109,305.

### Minister calls for new thinking

The First Lady and education minister, Janet Museveni, shared her observations about the sector yesterday during the opening of the sector review meeting in Kampala.

Mrs Museveni extolled the good performance rating that shows that the ministry met 74.4% of its objectives during the year under review, according to an assessment by the finance ministry.

However, the minister expressed displeasure about the low absorption of funds, leading to a stall in some development projects.

"This is a trend that ought to worry us as leaders because there are projects that are heavily funded, but the funding remains on the bank accounts, a concept that has been labelled as low absorption," she stated.

**GOOD PERFORMANCE**

*The ministry met 74.4% of its objectives during the year under review, according to an assessment by the ministry of finance*

She cited one project dubbed 'HEST' at the Uganda Management Institute, where only 5% of the funding has been set, yet its tenure is about to end.

"The project is behind schedule and I think it is because it is funded by the African Development Bank, otherwise we would be hearing voices calling for its cancellation," she explained.

She named, among other slow performing projects, the emergency construction and rehabilitation of primary schools, of which only 31% of the target has been achieved, and the construction of Aki-Bua Olympics Stadium in Lira district where only 23.6% has been achieved, two years after it was flagged off.

Mrs. Museveni, who was appointed as education minister last June, said some of the challenges faced by the sector are inherent.

"In my search for information to discover the reasons behind some weaknesses, I stumbled on some of the causes being systemic. For example, some of our funding agencies clear projects before the sector's readiness," she explained.

"Budget cuts and delays in released funds by the finance ministry were denying the education ministry chance to finish budget-supported projects," she said.

Charles Nsubuga, an official from the budget monitoring and accountability unit at the finance ministry, said low releases and procurement delays had led to low funds absorption rates in the education sector.

### Quality of education

A marginal improvement was recorded in terms of quality of education at pre-primary level with an improvement in pupil to teacher ratio from one teacher for every 22 pupils to one teacher for 21 learners. The number of caregivers rose to about 10,000. On average, there were 25 pupils sharing a classroom, a significant improvement from last year's ration of 31 students per class.

At primary level, 56 pupils were sharing a classroom, an improvement from the ratio of 63 learners to one classroom during the previous year. Proficiency in literacy and numeracy was shown to have improved over the same period for Primary Three and Primary Six pupils.

At secondary school, a 4% increase in student performance in the national exams was recorded, but the ratio of classrooms to learners declined slightly with more (53) learners sharing a classroom, compared to 52 the previous year. The BITVET sub-sector recorded a significant improvement in enrolment aided by construction and rehabilitation of facilities countrywide.

### Donors want action

The Belgian ambassador to Uganda and South Sudan, Hugo Verbist, noted that the past year indicated some of the significant improvements and challenges for the sector.

The envoy, who chairs the Education Development Partners, a group of donors funding the sector, hailed Uganda's efforts to improve policy direction through formulation of a new strategic plan; initiatives to boost quality of early childhood care, lower secondary education and vocational training, and the public-private partnership model embraced by the ministry to drive reforms.

The donors, however, expressed concern about the overall quality of education, for which the envoy said progress remains low, quoting low completion rates, absenteeism and regional disparities.

Verbist also cited inadequate safeguards for girls and young women who are prone to sexual abuse, rising poverty rates and the complex question of refugees who have flocked to Uganda in recent months.

The donors also want Uganda to explore alternative sources of financing in the future.

### Expert speak out

Augustine Omare-Okurut, the secretary general Uganda National Commission for UNESCO, advised that Uganda's education plan must conform to the 21st century needs and the sustainable development goals.