

# Pay more attention to education sector

This newspaper yesterday brought to the fore an issue that many parents have grumbled over, but find themselves footing the bills through the nose, resorting to poor alternatives or giving up on education altogether. Over the past two decades, many private schools have sprouted, thanks to the liberalisation policy started by the NRM government in the 1990s.

Whereas opening the education sector to private entities might have been a fair idea in itself, the poor government policy on monitoring and regulating these institutions has exposed parents to all sorts of proprietors, many of whom are profit-oriented. In January, the Ministry of Education and Sports Permanent Secretary, Mr Alex Kakooza, allowed secondary schools to increase school fees to meet the rising cost of living. Although he warned that the increase should "be

within the limit", he did not mention the maximum or minimum, opening it to individual institutions to do as they wish.

The system has thus birthed an education for the rich on the one hand and the poor on the other. Yet ideally, education is supposed to be an equaliser of sorts - one that bridges the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

For example, Victoria Najjulu, who is just one of the many parents suffering, told this newspaper that she was forced to transfer her child because the school, which she attended, demanded "weird" requirements such as baking flour, three kilogrammes of

## **The issue**

### **School demands**

#### **Our view:**

**The government, therefore, needs to do more in regulating the education sector with a view to providing affordable education to all the citizenry.**

rice, slasher, hoes and moppers, among others items. This is in addition to the already high school fees that schools determine at free will. Yet, like State Education minister Crysostom Muyingo told this newspaper yesterday, some parents like those that take children to his schools (Seeta High school, etc) can afford and are okay with the requirements.

The minister's statement implies that as long as one can afford, it is okay for private schools to ask for whatever fees or requirements they dream of. What Dr Muyingo - and perhaps other players - forgets is that what is good for a rich man's child, should also be good for a peasant's child.

The introduction of free primary and secondary education should have cured this issue. But the policy makers have abandoned these schools with no proper infrastructure and instructional materials. This has not only left the poor at crossroads, but has also forced some to set up substandard private schools to counter this. And what is the result? The government has found itself running after schools that do not meet the set minimum standards.

The government, therefore, needs to do more in regulating the education sector with a view to providing affordable education to all the citizenry.

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