

MWALIMU

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Gulu district pulls out guns against SCHOOL HUNGER

By Geoffrey Mutegeki and Arnest Tumwesige

In view of the parents' slow response to the Government call to offer lunch to their school-going children, Gulu district has pioneered a policy on school feeding.

The district has, with immediate effect, barred all non-government organisations from feeding pupils, on the ground that it is not sustainable. The district now compels parents and guardians to provide meals for their children or be punished.

Martin Ojara Mapenduzi, the Gulu district LC5 chairperson, tabled the policy a few days to Easter in the council, where it was received with overwhelming support.

However, according to the policy, no child shall be punished or prevented from attending school as a result of the parent's failure to contribute to the school feeding programme.

Parents who fail to provide lunch for their children can be arrested or face any other punishments as determined by the sub-county by-laws.

There are 55 schools in Gulu district. Of these, 25 are privately owned with 37,140 pupils. All these schools must adhere to the policy.

Schools are supposed to have at least 50% of the children eating under the programme after two years of its roll-out. Headteachers who

Schools which want to provide lunch and breakfast

Options of payment	Per Term	Per Month	Per Week	Per Year
Cash only	sh70,000	sh23,000	sh6,000	sh210,00
Less cash contribution plus food and items in kind (Oil, salt, firewood, cooks' salaries)	sh5,000	sh1,500	sh700	sh14,500
A parent also brings				
1. Sugar	2kg	2.5kg	10 tablespoons	6kg
2. Beans, g. nuts or peas	9kg	2.5kg	5.5kg	25kg
3. Maize, millet flour	12kg	4kg	1kg	36kg
OR				
Cassava/sweet potatoes	26kg	6.5kg	1.5kg	

Graphics by Dan Nseroko



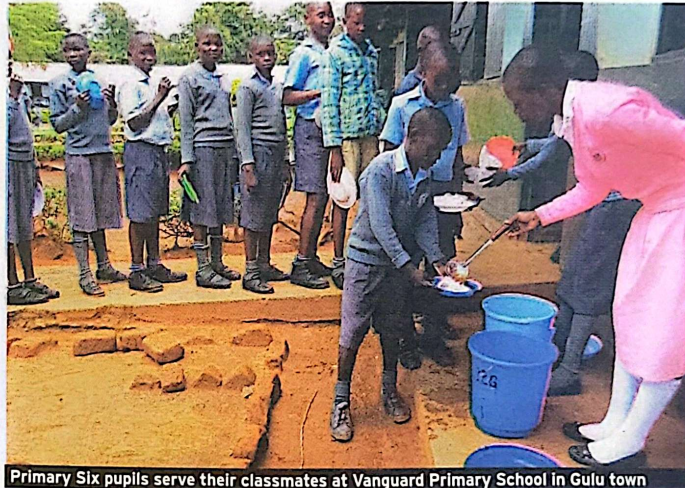
fail to implement the policy to the letter, will be subject to disciplinary action under the Public Standing Orders.

According to the Uganda Public Service Standing Orders 2010, "An act done without reasonable excuse by a public officer, which amounts to failure to perform any duty assigned to him or her, or which contravenes any laws relating to the Public Service or which is otherwise prejudicial to the efficient conduct of the Public Service or tends to bring the Public Service into disrepute constitutes misconduct."

Some of the misconducts include act or omission against public interest, using abusive language, unsatisfactory performance of duty, incitement with intent to cause disobedience/strike, undermining administration, use and abuse of drugs or alcohol, absence from duty without permission and insubordination, among others.

The power to discipline and remove public officers from office is provided for in the Constitution.

The proper disciplinary procedure shall be followed in all cases involving discipline and removal of public officers



Primary Six pupils serve their classmates at Vanguard Primary School in Gulu town

Help from NGOs banned
The policy which was passed by the district council, has also set tough conditions for NGOs, to get parents to take back the responsibility of feeding their children and for the sustainability of the programme when NGOs leave the area.

"We are encouraging the NGOs to gradually phase out their support and assistance

take over the responsibility," Mapenduzi said.

"No NGO shall be permitted to open up new negotiations or agreements of providing food to schools. Serving schools food undermines the long term sustainability of Gulu's school feeding policy," read the council document.

NGOs with memoranda of understanding with schools

of their contracts.

Currently in Gulu, there are only two schools, that is Awach P7 School and Lukodi Primary School, are supported by NGOs to feed children.

However, NGOs have been advised to provide support in terms of infrastructure, cooking equipment, kitchen or fencing of school gardens.

"Parents should know that it

said.

The Education Act 2008, places the responsibility of providing food for school children on the parents and guardians.

The education and sports guidelines on stakeholders' responsibilities in the Universal Primary Education programme, says: "Parents need to make a crucial contribution to the basic child nurturing and support through the provision of midday meals, for pupils at school."

Schools that have land are encouraged to allow parents to cultivate it and bring, or to grow and bring their contribution to the school feeding programme in kind.

No packed lunch

Contrary to the national policy position on feeding pupils, in Gulu, parents in public and private schools, are not expected to pack lunch for their children. They are expected to pay lunch fees or contribute food, which will be prepared at school.

The district's policy discourages parents from packing lunch for their children, which can only be permitted under special circumstances.

The policy says children will not be permitted to buy food from vendors or canteens near schools. In addition, vendors should not be allowed inside school grounds.

World over school feeding programmes are being adopted by many countries to improve pupils' performance and enhance their nutrition.

In 2015, the Government introduced national guidelines on school feeding designed to assist districts in the development and implementation of school feeding policies.

NO MORE HANDOUTS

The NGOs offering feeding programmes in schools have been told not to renew their contracts with schools to feed children. However, they may offer cooking facilities to the schools.

Gulu pulls out guns against school hunger

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Although several feeding interventions have been implemented at different times by donors, there has never been a countrywide programme.

"There are no other districts in Uganda that have developed a policy for school feeding programmes that are sustained by parents' contribution and not reliant on donor funding. This is the first of its kind," John Okwonga, the Gulu district speaker said.

Schools have also been asked to make their gardens functional. Schools without land may need to consider hiring or apply to use any suitably located government land.

The school gardens will be used to educate children about agricultural practices and utilise the land to produce food.

"No child shall be involved in any agricultural activities as a form of punishment, but be involved as an integrated part of learning," Okwonga said.

Standard payment for parents

According to Gulu district's policy all children will pay a standard fee for the feeding programme with variations only between urban and rural schools.

However, parents can contribute through two modes. These include paying cash or in kind by providing food.

Parents in urban schools will be required to pay sh55,000 per term, while their rural counterparts part with sh40,000.

Parents from rural schools and paying in kind will be required to provide sh4,000, plus 5kg of beans or groundnuts, 8kg of maize or millet flour or 10kg of sweet potatoes or cassava. Parents can contribute on a weekly, monthly, termly or annual basis. Urban parents paying in kind will part with sh5,000 plus 8kg of beans or groundnuts and 10kg of maize or millet flour or 20kg of sweet potato or cassava.

There are also options for parents to pay per month, per week or per year.

Is it worth it?

Caesar Akena, the Gulu District Education Officer (DEO), who described the passing of the policy as great day for every child in Gulu, saying the policy gives parents

options in which to ensure their children's feeding.

"We need parents to own this policy. Together with other leaders we will make it a priority to sensitise parents about the policy," Akena said.

He applauds the policy formulators for barring the NGOs from providing food. He said this would enable parents own the policy and support the feeding of the children.

"We have had many NGOs supporting the feeding programmes, but they leave us hanging. We want to make this a parents' policy," Akena said.

George Ogwette, the Layibi division councillor, says the policy is a relief to parents who have been charged exorbitant fees by private schools.

"Some schools have been charging parents more than sh100,000 for feeding per term. This is a relief to us as parents," Ogwette said.

The commissioner for Primary Education at the ministry of education, Daniel Nkaada says they are yet to review the policy passed by Gulu district.

"Local governments have the authority to make such bylaws as long as they are in line with the national policy. I have not looked at the policy so I cannot comment," Nkaada said.

Francis Oyat, a headteacher at Patiko Prison Primary School, says the policy reinforces what his school was already doing.

"We initiated the feeding policy in 2015 and it has been a great success. We started with porridge, but now everyone is feeding on other kinds of food," Oyat says.

With a population of 600 pupils, the institution also supplements the parents' contribution with food produced from the school farm. Parents have been given land

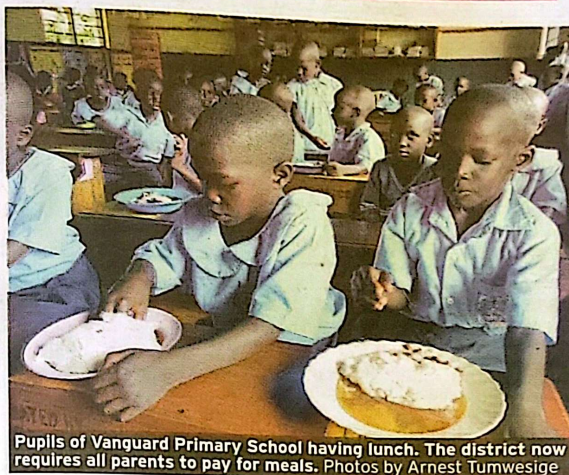
Lunch contributions for rural schools

Options of payment	Per Term	Per Month	Per Week	Per Year
Cash Only	sh40,000	sh13,500	sh3,500	sh120,000
Less cash contribution plus food and items in kind (covers salt, oil, firewood, cooks' salary)	sh4,000	sh1,500	sh500	sh1,2000
A. Parent also brings				
1. Beans, peas or g.nuts	5kg	1.5kg	1.5kg	15kg
2. Maize/millet flour	8kg	2.5	800gm	24kg
OR				
Sweet potatoes or cassava	15kg	4kg	1kg	



Lunch contribution for urban schools

Options of payment	Per Term	Per Month	Per Week	Per year
Cash Only	sh55,000	sh20,000	sh5,000	sh166,000
Less cash contribution plus food and items in kind (covers salt, oil, firewood, cooks' salaries)	sh5,000	sh1700	sh500	sh15,000
A. parent also brings				
1. Beans, peas and g.nuts	8kgs	2.5kg	700gm	24kg
2. Maize, millet	10kg	3.5kg	900gm	30kg
OR				
Sweet potatoes/ cassava	20kg	6kgs	1.5kg	



Pupils of Vanguard Primary School having lunch. The district now requires all parents to pay for meals. Photos by Arnest Tumwesige

and they are already producing food to feed their children.

"We discourage packed lunch. We know its disadvantages and parents have been co-operative," Oyat says.

Peninah Lamunu, the headteacher of Vanguard Primary School, says the policy is well-thought out, and will soon see pupils in the whole district have lunch.

WHAT PARENTS SAY

Jackie Akello, parent
This is a good move. It will get all children eating a uniform meal. It will also reduce cases of food poisoning.

Innocent Max Opiro, parent
This policy will help our children to concentrate on their studies because they are not on an empty stomach. Similarly, if children get lunch at school, they will save the time wasted to go looking for lunch at their homes or in the villages.

Carol Lamunu
I'm happy with this initiative. Children are now assured that once their parents respond to this call, they will easily get school lunch. We hope it will improve their performance.

"This is about our children. When children eat at school they are happy and concentrate in class. Giving children lunch at school helps them get focused in class, especially in the afternoon," Lamunu says.

Alex Kitara, the chairperson of Patiko Prisons Primary School Parents Teachers Association, said the policy would see both enrolment and performance in Gulu improve.

"Many pupils do not concentrate in the afternoon because they are hungry. If schools are compelled to provide lunch, children's academic performance will improve," Kitara said. He commended the policy formulators for barring NGOs from feeding school children, which he said is good, for the programme's sustainability.

Studies on feeding

Could hunger really be destroying the stems of free education in this country? Experts, parents, educationists and the government...

has difficulty in learning," the report says.

For a school-age child, missing breakfast can lead to fatigue and a

sugar concentration high enough to support the activity of the brain and the nervous system.

in Amuru district said. It leads to increased school enrolment - particularly for girls.

in Bangladesh a school

Malawi and India. "Deficiency in balanced diet leads to reduced cognitive function," Dr Matthew Jukes,

candidates for poor performance and dropping out of school.

Children who are hungry at school are likely to

Implication of hunger at school