



The toilet that Kijabwemi PS received from Blocks of Hope. Photo by Dismus Buregyeya

Modern toilets keep Masaka girls in school

MASAKA

Dismus Buregyeya

The school dropout rate for girls in Masaka municipality has reduced due to the improvement in menstruation management and sanitation standards.

The municipal education officer, Joseph Kakeeto, cited Masaka Police Barracks Primary School, Nyendo Public Primary School, Gayaza, Kijabwemi and Hill Road Public among the primary schools where the dropout has significantly reduced.

New Vision has learnt that the school enrolment in Masaka Police, Nyendo Public and Gayaza Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools has doubled since 2016. This was after the improvements in sanitation standards and classroom infrastructure supported by the Government and parents.

According to Kakeeto, Masaka Police Primary School pupil enrolment has doubled from 250 to 500, while at Gayaza, it increased from 200 to 600. Nyendo Public Primary School also registered a high pupil enrolment from 500 to 800.

He said the toilet stance rates have been improved to reduce congestion.

Kakeeto said Masaka municipal council education department designed a model toilet with menstruation handling facilities, which has proved to be effective in controlling the school drop out rates of girls.

Kakeeto said the municipal council has supported the initiative to construct friendly toilet facilities for girls and

pupils with disabilities using the equalisation grant at division levels.

He was speaking to *New Vision* after the commissioning of Kijabwemi Primary School modern toilet facilities funded by Blocks of Hope in partnership with SMART on November 28.

Kakeeto said water and incinerators to help in the disposing of used pads is good for the health of the pupils.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ The modern toilets have the rooms where girls can clean themselves during menstruation and an incinerator.

He said initially, girls would remain home during their menstruation periods.

"What do you expect in some schools where the boys share toilets with girls and teachers? We are lucky that we have got funding from Blocks of Hope to support the affected schools," Kakeeto said.

He said at Kijabwemi Primary School, the toilet constructed under the School Facilities Grant (SFG) was rejected over shoddy work.

"The toilet was bound to collapse. Both boys and girls were sharing the teachers' toilets causing those in menstruation periods to be isolated," he said.

The Blocks of Hope director, Rebecca Kiwanuka, told *New Vision* that they have rolled out a countrywide programme to support schools in menstruation hygiene and management for girls above nine years.

Other programmes include sex education, early pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and confidence building among the school girls.

She said the organisation also targets young mothers and widows with orphans to empower them with self-sustenance skills.

Kiwanuka said they will ultimately be empowered to support girls, especially in the areas of education and discipline.

The Kijabwemi Church of Uganda parish priest in West Buganda Diocese, the Rev. John Niwagaba, urged the Ministry of Education and Sports to give priority to the provision of free sanitary pads to girls, especially under the UPE programme to reduce on the school dropout rates.

He said the rights of the girl child to education must be prioritised to save the future mothers of the nation.

The headteacher Kijabwemi Primary School, Joseph Sirigenda, said many UPE schools do not have adequate toilets to match the increased pupil enrolment.

"My school has close to 800 pupils and we have a three stance toilet yet we need about 25 stances," he said.

The health prefect at Kijabwemi Primary School, Dorcus Namata, said the pit hole in the teachers toilets was so big and scaring to the girls.

She said they were happy to get a modern toilet with an incinerator to dispose of the pads.

"After disposing of the pads, we now have a side room where we can clean ourselves with water and soap," she said.

Namata said the reusable sanitary pads should be promoted in the school.