

SOME MEN SPEND MONEY ON ALCOHOL RATHER THAN BUYING FOOD TO PACK FOR THEIR CHILDREN — FIRST LADY

By Wilson Asimwe

The First Lady and education minister, Mrs Janet Museveni, has launched the national school feeding mobilisation campaign of parents and leaders at all levels to ensure that all children get a meal while at school.

The First Lady started the campaign during a radio talk show on Voice of Toro in Fort Portal municipality on Tuesday.

"I am here to talk to you about the importance of good nutrition and feeding for our children while at school because a hungry child cannot concentrate and ends up performing poorly," she said during the evening programme.

Mrs. Museveni was accompanied to the radio station by Kabarole local leaders, who included Burahya MP Margaret Muhanga, Kabarole district chairman Richard Rwabuhinga, resident district commissioner Steven Asiimwe, district education officer Patrick Rwakaikara and the commissioner for teacher education standards from the education ministry, Dr Cleophas Mugenyi.

During the talk show, moderated by Betty Mujungu, the First Lady said after the education ministry discovered that many of the children spend the day at school without a meal, it declared a national campaign on nutrition and school feeding this year.

She said in-school meals and proper nutrition promote healthy children and good performance in class, while poor nutrition makes children fall sick, often missing classes and performing poorly.

Mrs. Museveni told the listeners that research findings show that children in areas where parents feed them at school are healthy and perform well.

"I urge those parents who live

First Lady launches school feeding awareness campaign



Mrs Museveni (centre) with the talk show crew shortly after the school feeding campaign talk session on Voice of Toro radio in Fort Portal Town on Tuesday

in towns and cannot pay for meals at school for their school-going children to pack food for them and advise those who can pay for lunch for their children at school to do so," she said.

The education minister said she was happy to hear that Kabarole parents pack food for their school-going children while others pay for lunch at school, enabling at least 70% to have a meal while at school.

She said food, shelter and clothing were basic human needs which all parents must provide for their children. She said it is shameful for the parents to neglect their responsibility thinking it is the Government to feed their children.

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ The commissioner for teacher education standards from the education ministry, Dr Cleophas Mugenyi, said the education ministry would follow up on school feeding issues.

Mrs. Museveni criticised some men who spend a lot of money on alcohol rather than buying food to pack for their children and meeting their school needs. She called on the communities and local leaders to fight this.

When she was asked whether

it was right for schools to send children without packed food back home, the First Lady said teachers are sometimes forced to do this when the children stop concentrating in class and doze off because of hunger.

She, however, said President Yoweri Museveni is against sending away children from school because of failure to pay money for food and that he says the children whose parents cannot pay money, should be allowed to bring packed food.

The First Lady said when she was MP for Ruhaama, she used to work with the LCI chairpersons to identify and mobilise parents whose children were going without a meal at

school.

She called on all parents, local leaders, religious leaders and the communities to get involved in this campaign and ensure that no child goes without a meal while at school.

"I am now lighting the fire which will not go out if you local leaders keep fanning the flame," she said.

She also urged leaders to promote the growing of enough food and construction of granaries for storage of the excess food for a bad day. She criticised men for neglecting their role of constructing granaries for food storage.

Mrs. Museveni decried the current trend of parents letting

their children leave home for school unaccompanied when it is still dark.

This, she said, is dangerous and unnecessary since all schools are supposed to start business at 8:00am and close by 5:00pm.

Muhanga urged the Kabarole parents to ensure proper nutrition for their children to prevent them from stunted growth.

She said: "Feeding a child is not hard, you do not need to go to the market or supermarket. Feed them on our local foods such as matooke, potatoes, pumpkins, beans and *dodo*, as well as fruits, which we can grow in our backyards."

Rwabuhinga said they would continue mobilising parents so that even the remaining 30% of children in Kabarole start having a meal at school. He, however, said a hungry teacher could not be effective and urged schools to give their teachers lunch.

Asiimwe said they were going to engage the Police to address the issue of parents who let their children walk to school alone when it was still dark.

Rwakaikara thanked the Government for the World Bank-supported nutrition project of which the district is a beneficiary. He told parents that if they happened to see their children in the gardens, it would be because they are being taught how to grow foods with micronutrients, as part of the school timetable.