

First Lady urges parents to read with their children

By John Agaba

The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs. Janet Museveni, told parents yesterday to find time to read with their children.

"Literacy levels remain a challenge in Uganda, with a significant portion of the population unable to read or write due, in part, to a lack of a reading culture at early stages and parents have a big responsibility to reverse the trend," she said in a statement read by state minister for higher education Dr John Chrysostom Muyingo.

This was at a function where the US donated 1.5 million books for distribution to primary schools in 66 districts across Uganda.

"Reading expands children's vocabulary, stimulates their creativity, imagination and encourages independent access to information. It also arouses interests of pupils in matters outside the curriculum," she said.

Muyingo said he is what he is because his mother always sat down with him, when he was a little boy and read with him.

"Parents, you have to find time for the children. Sit down with them and read a book or newspapers. There are so many age-appropriate materials that you can read with them," Muyingo said.

The US ambassador to Uganda, Deborah Malac, said: "Reading feeds the imagination. As a child's ability to read improves, they can be inspired in so many ways — to continue their education, to dream about professions they have never heard about, and to dedicate themselves towards creating a bright future for themselves, their families and Uganda."

The function at Kiwafu Primary School in Entebbe was largely interactive and demonstrative when the US Ambassador and the minister sat in front of the pupils and started reading with them.

Through the USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Programme and the USAID/Uganda Literacy Achievement and Retention Activity implemented by RTI International, more than 1.5 million pupil books and teacher guidelines will be distributed in selected schools across the country.

Mrs. Museveni said the materials play a big role in children's "learning to read; developing reading as a habit; and reading for pleasure and enrichment."

"One of the fundamental requirements of all education systems is the adequate provision of relevant and appropriate reading and other instructional and learning

materials for use by teachers and their pupils," she said.

"Children must be provided with a range of reading materials in order to differentiate and meet all children at their reading level."

Malac said the US was committed to improving access to reading materials of various styles and levels in the country to improve grade-level reading abilities.

She said since 2014, USAID support has allowed more than 900,000 library books to be "processed, packed and distributed" to more than 800 primary schools — and ultimately into the hands of children eager to read.

"Reading stimulates their imagination and encourages independent access to information."

Mrs. Museveni

She said plans were under way to distribute an additional 800,000 books to new schools over the next two years.

"These books are interesting, fun, and grade-appropriate for young readers," the US Ambassador said.

"They include picture and storybooks, dictionaries, general knowledge books, science titles and biographies."

At the function, district education offices for Mityana and Bushenyi also received book consignments which they will take to their schools.

Schools that receive the books are largely selected on the basis of their interest and commitment to host a library and encourage reading

through school and community activities.

Rosemary Lipa Namulumba, the headteacher of Kiwafu Primary School, thanked the Americans for the aid, saying it would increase the variety

of reading materials in their library. Daniel Ndagga, the Entebbe municipal education officer, said: "We need to create a culture of reading in Ugandans, but we can only start with the young."



Aisha Nanyonjo, a Primary Four pupil at Kiwafu Primary School, reading with Muyingo and Malac at her school yesterday. Photo by Kennedy Oryema

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