



Learners. Pupils of Abok Primary School in Oyam District read a book at the school campus last week. PHOTO BY BILL OKETCH

Why Oyam pupils stay away from school

Complaint. The head teacher of Abok Primary School, Mr Anthony Nam, says lack of parental support for the children is one of the key causes of the high dropout rate.

BY BILL OKETCH
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OYAM. Bonny Okello, a Primary Seven pupil, arrives at Abok Primary School at 7am each morning ready to attend lessons.

But Okello finds it difficult to study on an empty stomach, from 7am up to 5pm.

With a total enrolment of 1,730 pupils at the school, the population is fairly encouraging in the morning.

But a good number of the learners dodge the afternoon lessons because of hunger.

At the school in Abok Sub-county, 77 pupils have registered and are eagerly waiting to sit the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE).

Only 23 PLE candidates get their lunch from school, excluding Okello.

The meal is contributed by the parents.

"You can see that there is al-

ready hunger that cannot allow us to stay in school," says Okello.

"Because of hunger, some of my friends have dropped out of school and they are now staying at home with their parents," he adds.

Ms Monica Obote, a teacher, says: "When you sample five families, you will find that five children of school-going age are at home."

The head teacher of Abok Primary School, Mr Anthony Nam, says lack of parental support for the children is one of the key causes of the high dropout rate.

"And today, you are seeing very many pupils at the compound but if you were to come last week before the examinations, they were very few. People were busy in the gardens harvesting soya beans," he says.

Of the 1,730 pupils, only 838 did end of term exams, meaning more than half missed the exams because their parents did not pay Shs2,000 examination fees.

The money is used for buying the examination papers from Oyam District Examination Board (ODEB). It's mandatory for all the 109 government-aided primary schools in Oyam to sit the same examination prepared by ODEB.

Voices

"Because of hunger, some of my friends have dropped out of school and they are now staying at home with their parents,"

BONNY OKELLO,
PRIMARY SEVEN
PUPIL OF ABOK
PRIMARY SCHOOL

"When you sample five families, you will find that five children of school-going age are at home,"

MONICA OBOTE,
TEACHER



"When the term opens, very few pupils report to school; others report after two weeks or after one month. They miss on average four-month lesson in a whole year. When the child reaches Primary Seven, he is half-baked and cannot perform well,"

ANTHONY
NAM, ABOK PRIMARY
SCHOOL HEAD
TEACHER

children from going to school during crop planting and harvesting period and force them to work in farms during class hours.

The crop planting period takes one month and harvesting also takes a month, meaning that some pupils are forced to be out of school for two months.

"Now for two months the child is not at school: first term and second term. When the term opens, very few pupils report to school; others report after two weeks or after one month. They miss on average four-month lesson in a whole year. When the child reaches Primary Seven, he is half-baked and cannot perform well," Mr Nam adds.

Teacher absenteeism

The district education officer, Mr Norman Okello, says absenteeism among teachers and pupils is one of the biggest challenges facing most rural schools in Oyam District.

He says parents are unwilling to contribute towards the education of their children.

"Ten years ago, most of the pupils used to attend lessons under tree shade. This was after a lot of infrastructures were destroyed by the rebels of the Lord's Re-

sistance Army (LRA)," Mr Okello says.

As a result of the massive destructions caused by the two-decade insurgency in northern Uganda, many schools did not have classrooms and were unable to provide accommodation for teachers.

The quality of education dropped drastically, with some schools failing to produce even a single pupil in Division One in PLE.

Mr Okello says the situation has improved due to the intervention by government and its development partners.

He, however, adds that more still needs to be done to improve the quality of education in the district.

DIRECTIVE

In 2016 the government directed parents to ensure they feed their children while at school.

The directive is contained in a policy guideline on School Feeding and Nutrition Intervention Programme for use in Universal Primary Education and Universal Post Primary Education and training school systems which Cabinet recently approved.

REPORT

In 2014, a Uwezo Uganda assessment in Oyam District revealed that three out of 10 children assessed in Primary Seven were unable to read and comprehend a Primary Two level story and do Primary Two level numeracy tasks.