

BY JAVIER SILAS OMAGOR

PARENTS MUST PROVIDE LUNCH TO THEIR SCHOOL CHILDREN – FIRST LADY

The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs. Janet Museveni has cautioned parents against neglecting the role of providing school meals for their children.

The First Lady was on Tuesday evening speaking during a radio talk show in Mbale town hosted by Step Broadcasting Corporation-SBC Media Centre, the home to Open Gate and Step FM/TV.

The radio talk show was part of the First Lady's School Feeding and Nutrition Campaign, through which her ministry is mobilising and encouraging parents to ensure that their school-going children have meals while at school in order to ensure quality education in the country.

Mrs. Museveni explained that the purpose of her campaign was to help her as the education minister and her team to improve on the education performance.

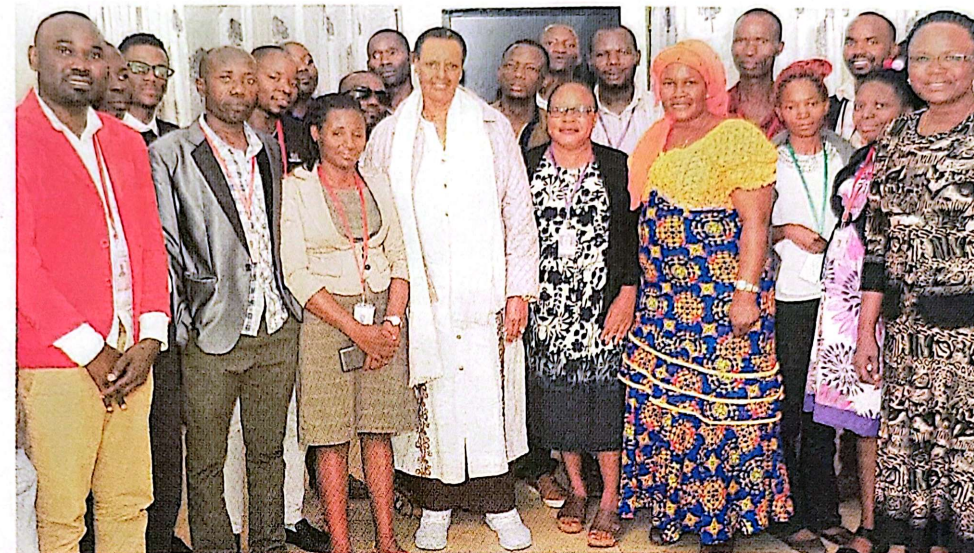
"School feeding makes a difference in the lives of our learners," she said, adding that it also helps the parents to ensure the children's good health.

Responding to a question asked by the programme moderator, Ronnie Wabomba on why government should not provide meals for school children, the minister said that was the responsibility of parents.

"Food, a home shelter, clothing and health care when they are sick should be provided by parents. These are basic requirements which no parent needs to be reminded of and this is not just for school time alone but for life," Mrs. Museveni said.

She assured listeners that government programmes such as Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) were introduced to ensure access to quality education, but both government and parents have different roles to play.

"UPE and USE do not entail feeding. The Government has a role and a parent also



First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports Janet Museveni with the Staff of Open Gate and Step FM in Mbale after the radio talk show. With orange head gear is the Woman MP Mbale and chairperson of the parliamentary education committee Connie Nakayenze Galiwango

has a role to play, and that is providing meals for learners. Some people think that if they neglect feeding children for so long the Government could pick it up but government is not ready to pick it up because education of the children is a shared responsibility between government and parents."

She stressed that as a ministry, they want to make sure that all children have lunch at school, and hope that they are also fed at home.

"We have agreed that people in urban areas and towns can pay a lunch fee to schools their children go to and those who cannot afford or in rural areas are allowed to pack nutritious food from home for

Traditional schools

The minister promised to prioritise the revival of the once glorious government schools such as Bukedi College Kachonga. "The traditional schools have lost their past glories because they are not rehabilitated and parents have opted for other schools (private schools) but we are going to rehabilitate them well and ensure that they regain the glory," Mrs. Museveni assured.

their children. This is because those in town get salaries and can afford to pay money. It is a shame that rural people are the ones who grow food that people in towns use to feed their children at school and they end up performing better and yet those who grow that food fail to feed their children," she said.

Asked on what penalties would be considered against parents who ignore the school feeding call, Mrs. Museveni reiterated that the Education Act 2005 gives the ministry provision to use force against such parents, but they are not going to rush to use it.

"The reason I started this campaign is to have a dialogue

with members of public and remind them of their role in education, I hope our people don't push us to go there (To use force to compel them to provide meals for their children)," Mrs. Museveni explained.

The minister also wants the levying of school lunch fees to be executed by the Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) and not by the school administrations or authorities.

She also reacted to reports that some parents had been compelled by some school authorities to contribute for teachers' meals.

"It is absurd and irresponsible for schools to ask parents to pay for teachers' meals yet

the children are not eating at school, this is bad and I think we shall have to do something about it. How can you feed teachers and leave out their little learners on empty stomachs? This shows how teachers have also lost compassion and foresight, which would otherwise lead them to work with parents to overcome the failure to feed their children," Mrs. Museveni noted.

The First Lady also cautioned politicians against politicizing the School Feeding and Nutrition Campaign. "They should embrace it and mobilise our people to play their role for the sake of the quality of life and education."

POOR PERFORMANCE

For the last three years, eastern Uganda has been registering poor academic performance in national examinations, including the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE), Uganda Certificate of Education and in Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education.

For instance, at primary school level alone, the region has the highest number of pupil enrolment in the country, currently standing at 2.6 million pupils compared to the rest of the regions. But while releasing the 2017 PLE results, Uganda National Examinations Board highlighted districts in Eastern Uganda as the worst performing.

Mrs. Museveni attributed it to lack of school feeding that results in hungry learners causing absenteeism. "Children cannot study when they are hungry, some of them will resort to absenteeism because they fear to go and starve at school," the minister observed.