

Construction of 84 schools starts

By John Agaba

After the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Janet Museveni alighted at Lutaba Chance Primary School in Wakiso district yesterday, she was given a hoe, which she used to dig a hole in the ground. This symbolised commencement of construction works at 84 public primary schools in selected 26 districts across the country.

The gesture also highlighted that the ministry's Uganda School and Teacher Effectiveness Project, under which a total of 138 schools would be refurbished, was on schedule. Works at the initial 54 sites of the project almost complete.

Mrs. Museveni said the revamped schools would improve pupils' learning environments and enhance quality of education in the country.

Each of the 84 schools, like the initial 54, will receive seven classrooms, one administration block, one rainwater harvesting tank and two toilet blocks – for boys and girls. They will also receive one toilet stance for teachers.

Some schools, especially the ones in remote areas, will also get two units as teachers' houses.

The project is expected to benefit over 112,000 pupils.

"The selection of these 138 schools was an uphill task, taking into consideration the numbers of schools that still require facilities to enable them meet the basic requirements and minimum standards set by the ministry," Mrs. Museveni said.

She said following a study of school infrastructure countrywide, the 138 schools were selected from more than 900 needy schools.

"The ministry is committed to do more than this, but it



First Lady Janet Museveni (wearing hat), Wakiso Woman MP Rosemary Seninde, Busiro East MP Peter Sematimba and teachers and pupils of Lutaba Chance Primary School during the launch of the sites for construction in 26 districts. This was in Sisa sub-county in Wakiso district yesterday. Photo by Maria Wamala

will take a gradual process for which we call upon you all to exercise patience," the minister said.

"As of today, the 54 schools are due for completion this December. Thereafter, the ministry will furnish them and the children can begin to learn in safe, secure and clean environments," she added.

The 54 schools that benefited in the first phase of the investment are in six districts of Alebtong, Arua, Bukwo, Kapchorwa, Ibanda and Isingiro.

The First Lady urged the contractors to adhere to environmental and social safe

Six million textbooks distributed to 14,854 primary schools countrywide are expected to improve the pupil-book ratio to 3:1 and 4:1 for literacy and numeracy respectively.

guards.

"We do not expect workers on sites to play around with our children, especially the girls. We do not expect them to misuse the available sources

of water, cutting and replacing available trees, to mention but a few," Mrs. Museveni emphasised.

She said the ministry recognised education as a

"key and fundamental human right" and would, with utmost dedication, continue to execute its obligation of ensuring universal and equitable access to education for all.

She said she worked closely with the ministries of finance and public service to ensure they recruit more teachers to meet the growing demand across the country.

Mohammed Mubogi, the headteacher of Lutaba Chance Primary School commended the First Lady and the Government for the initiative which would allow them have some "breathing space".

The school has six teachers,

including the headteacher and a pupil population of 212 (105 boys and 107 girls).

Kirill Vasiliev, a World Bank senior education specialist said the project was not just about building schools and called for quality of education.

Vasiliev said skills development was paramount to build for the future.

State minister for primary education Rosemary Seninde said clerks of works had been recruited to provide daily supervision at each site so there is no shoddy work.

Refurbishment of the 138 schools, which will cost \$33m, is part of the bigger \$100m grant the Government received from the World Bank through the Global Partnership for Education programme in March 2015.

"This support will, among others, benefit 6.5 million pupils with new textbooks and ensure 20,800 primary school teachers are trained in teaching literacy skills, improved in-service tutoring, improved child caring at early childhood development centres and school leadership," Mrs. Museveni said.

Over six million textbooks have been distributed to 14,854 primary schools countrywide to benefit over seven million pupils.

This is expected to improve the pupil-book ratio to 3:1 and 4:1 for literacy and numeracy respectively. Some 10,171 teachers have been trained in Early Grade Reading methodology for primary grades one to three.

Gradually, the reading abilities of children in early grades specifically in English and 10 local languages in 27 districts are being improved.

It is estimated that a total of 864,535 Primary One to Primary Three pupils in 27 districts are benefiting from the trained teachers.