



Desperate. A teacher conducts a class under a tree at Kitiko Primary School in Buvuma District. The increasing dropouts have been attributed to the extra fees charged under Universal Primary Education. PHOTO BY DENIS EDEMA

Extra UPE charges lock out pupils

Concern. Most parents say they are financially incapacitated and cannot afford the extra charges levied by schools.

BY TAUSI NAKATO
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

JINJA. In December 1996, government announced that four children of school-going age per family would benefit from free primary education, starting from January 1997.

This policy became known as Universal Primary Education (UPE). Ten years later, Universal Secondary Education (USE) was introduced.

However, extra fees being charged by schools benefiting from these programmes is keeping many children without formal education, *Daily Monitor* has established.

Although government banned schools implementing the programmes from charging extra fees, a number of them are violating this policy.

A visit at Kikaramoja Village in Walukuba-Masese Division in Jinja District during school hours showed

that some children had dropped out of school despite the introduction of free education. Most of them either engage in petty businesses or working as house maids.

Kikaramoja Village, which is a slum area, is in close proximity to Masese Primary School and Masese Seed Secondary School which are both UPE and USE aided.

Most parents here say they are financially incapacitated and cannot afford the extra charges.

Ms Edrid Nakimba, a 30-year-old mother of four, says: "I am not working. My husband repairs plastic jerrycans and basins where he earns very little money, just enough for food. My first born dropped out of school when he was in Primary Five after my failure to pay Shs50,000. My other children dropped out too," she laments.

Also Ms Patience Amulen says she has not taken her children to school because she is a single mother who cannot afford food, rent and school fees.

"Most of us find it challenging to educate our children because we are

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Government says it sends a capitation grant to schools and that is the money they are supposed to use for managing the schools. However, school heads say they cannot only rely on the capitation grant because it is very little and delays to come hence the charges to cater for teachers' allowances for food and transport.

the sole providers for the family. For example, my husband died. I provide everything," she says.

But Mr Steven Musisi, also a resident says since the parents are very poor, they force their children to remain at home looking after their young ones while they go and look for food.

The village chairperson, Mr John Mweru, says 60 per cent of the children in his area, which has about 10,000 people, are not in school.

"I have sensitised parents about the importance of education but most of them have ignored me. Others prefer sending children to sell bananas and roasted maize," Mr Mweru says.

The parents say they are charged between Shs20,000 and Shs70,000 for fees, Shs45,000 for lunch and Shs20,000 for Development, uniform and scholastic materials.

The Jinja Resident District Commissioner (RDC), Mr Peter Locap, says schools that are

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Minister advises youth

TORORO: The State Minister for Disaster Preparedness, Mr Musa Eweru, has advised youth to engage in farming to fight unemployment and poverty. The minister made the remarks on Saturday at Teso Action Against Poverty meeting. "The youth should embrace local initiatives like farming to fight poverty and to create employment opportunities," he said. Mr Eweru also decried the rate at which the people in Teso sub-region are destroying the environment through charcoal burning and sand mining. [Joseph Omollo]

Insurance firms urged

MBALE: Taxi operators and boda boda cyclists in Mbale Town have asked insurance firms to design affordable packages. Speaking at a meeting with officials from Insurance Institute of Uganda (IIU) in Mbale Town on Saturday, the taxi operators said it is necessary that insurance firms design packages affordable to low income earners. The chief executive officer of IIU, Mr Saul Sseremba, said they would push the firms to respond according to their requests. [Olivier Mukaaya]

School dropouts rise as parents fail to pay extra fees

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Voices

"According to the UPE policy, all pupils must access education at no cost. Currently, we are not aware of head teachers in UPE schools who are charging pupils fees. Whoever is doing so will be dealt with. Government sends a capitation grant to schools and that is the money they are supposed to use for managing the schools."

ROSEMARY SSENINDE,
STATE MINISTER FOR
PRIMARY EDUCATION

"We charge Shs25,000 as UPE extra fees to cater for teachers' top up, power, water and transport; you can't run a school when parents can't pay anything."

CHRISTINE BABIRYE,
MASESE CO EDUCATION
PRIMARY SCHOOL
HEAD TEACHER

charging extra fees are doing so illegally because it is a free programme to all children.

"There must be an understanding between the parents and the school management committee," he adds, threatening to deal with parents who have refused to take their children to school.

The State Minister for Primary Education, Ms Rosemary Sseninde, says: "According to the UPE policy, all pupils must access education at no cost. Currently, we are not aware of head teachers in UPE schools who are charging pupils fees. Whoever is doing so will be dealt with. Government sends a capitation grant to schools and that is the money they are supposed to use for managing the schools."

However, the Director of Studies at Namasiga Primary School in Busedde Sub-county, Mr John Lukooki Magezi, says schools cannot only rely on the capitation grant because it is very little and delays to come.

The Masese Co Education Primary School head teacher, Ms Christine Babirye, says they levy extra fees and lunch after it was agreed upon between parents and the school management committee.

"We charge Shs25,000 as UPE extra fees to cater for teachers' top up, power, water and transport; you can't run a school when parents can't pay anything," she says.

She also said the number of school dropout in her school has increased from 900 pupils to 637 due to parents' 'vulnerability'.

"Last year, we had an organisation that was feeding pupils while at school. When it stopped, the number of pupils reduced by 300. My parents are mostly from slum areas like Kikaramoja and are financially unstable," she said.

She added: "Even girls have dropped out of school because they can't afford sanitary towels. They opt to use papers which can't hold blood."

briefly

District name to change

MANAFWA

Man hok