Dilemma. Officials wonder how new pupils in public schools will effectively study if there are no teachers to conduct lessons.

Understaffing in Mubende hurting service delivery

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Education. Kiyuni Secondary School in Mubende District, which is faced with understaffing. PHOTO BY JOSEPHINE NNABBAALE

MUBENDE. The vast understaffing gap in Mubende, one of the geographically largest districts in the country with 19 sub-counties, is affecting service delivery, officials have said.

The Auditor General's report submitted to Parliament on December 29 last year listed Mubende as one district with the highest under-staffing levels in the country with a human resource gap of almost 77 per cent.

According to Ms Lillian Nakamatte, the district's chief administrative officer (CAO), more than 505 posts in various departments have remained vacant following a directive from the Ministry of Public Service stopping all districts from recruiting new staff.

"Education is the most affected department with more than 245 vacant positions, including 16 head teachers, 75 deputy head teachers, 23 senior education assistants and 134 Grade III teachers," Ms Nakamatte said in an interview last week.

Vacancies

She said the district health department has 26 vacant positions, administration department has 45, statutory bodies has two, planning department (10), finance department (nine) natural resources department (1) community based services (five), production department (10) extension workers (15) trade, industry and local economic development (five) Kasambya Town Council (54)among others.

The Auditor General's report also indicates that under-staffing has overstretched the available staff beyond their capacity, thus creating job-related stress to the available staff.

Shs2.9b

ADDITIONAL FUNDS THAT THE DISTRICT NEEDS ANNUALLY TO CATER FOR THE REQUIRED HUMAN RESOURCE

The report advised the district accounting officer to continue engaging the ministries of Public Service, Local Government and Finance to address the problem.

However, the district chairperson, Mr Francis Kibuuka, said they have on several occasions, written to the Public Service and Finance ministries about the challenges but have not yet received a response.

"I appeal to the government to look into this matter so that we fill these vacant positions and enable our district perform to its full capacity," Mr Kibuuka said.

"It is true we are understaffed but there is no money to cater for wages of new staff. So, recruiting more workers without increasing our wage bill will create more problems," he added.

Recently, the Ministry of Finance suggested a temporary halt of all new recruitments across public service citing lack of funds.

The ministry further noted that new staff recruitment should be carried out strictly on replacement basis.

Mr Kibuuka wondered how new pupils enrolled in public schools will effectively study if there are no teachers.

The district has a total of 439 primary schools of which, 299 are government aided.

Mr Kibuuka said the district has two health centres, but cannot be opened since there are no health workers.

The district receives a total of Shs17b annually and nearly Shs4.3b per quarter (three months) for staff wages, but this money, according to the CAO, is not enough to cater for wages of new staff.

"We need at least an additional Shs2.9 billion annually to cater for the required human resource," Ms Nakamatte said.

However, Mr Simeo Nsubuga, Kasanda South MP, blamed some district officials for the poor service delivery.

"We admit that there is a problem of understaffing, which is a general problem across the country, but still, the few civil servants we have in Mubende are lazy and corrupt," he said.

Mr Nsubuga said there are a number of 'ghost' employees across different departments in the district, adding that he had already invited the Inspector General of Government (IGG) to investigate district officials.

Understaffing is not limited to Mubende alone. According to Auditor General's report, although the planned number of staff to be recruited at district, municipality and sub-county levels was 5,000, by close of the financial year under review (2016/17), the number of positions filled was only 2,760, leaving a staffing gap of 2,240.

New districts

Recently, the secretary to the Treasury, Mr Keith Muhakanizi, blamed government's failure to fill the vacant positions on the rising population and the "choice to expand government" through creation of new districts, counties and municipalities.

Mr Muhakanizi said "it is not a question of blame game, but a question of prioritisation and pressures of expanding government".

"Blaming Finance for these things is wrong, we are not the policymakers, we are not the ones, who made a choice to expand government," Mr Muhakanizi said.

"The government priorities over the past few years have been to deal with infrastructure challenges, put money into wealth creation initiatives and finance free education. This is the reason we have not been able to fill the vacancies you are talking about," he added.

Explaining how the government intends to fix the service delivery gaps without the necessary human resource, Mr Muhakanizi said: "I have recommended to policymakers to stop expanding government for at least five years to enable us fill the vacant positions and fix all the gaps in the service delivery chain."

STAFF GAPS IN OTHER MINISTRIES

The 2017 Auditor General's review of the approved staffing structures of seven ministries and 12 statutory enterprises revealed that the Uganda Police Force has a staffing shortage of 28,791, followed by Uganda Prison Services with 6,324 unfilled jobs, while the Judiciary has 2,864 unfilled slots. Others are Agriculture (327), Justice (177), Kampala Capital City Authority which has a staffing gap of 189, the Department of Ethics and Integrity (69), Health Service Commission (32), while the Finance ministry has 20 unfilled slots.



briefly

Teachers face demotion

SEMBABULE: Sembabule District chairperson Elly Muhumuza has directed the district education officer, Mr Paul Bwana, to demote all head teachers in government primary schools, who never got a first grade in the recently released 2017 Primary Leaving Examinations. Mr Muhumuza said there is no reason why such school heads should remain in charge when they do not make pupils pass final exams. He wondered why some private schools with teachers, who are not 'qualified' make pupils pass yet their government counterparts, who are qualified and get fair a salary, register failures. [Malik Fahd Jjingo]

RDC cautions on land

LWENGO: The Lwengo Resident District Commissioner, Ms Harriet Nakamya, has raised concern over increasing cases of land conflicts in the district. Ms Nakamya said she registers more than two land-related conflicts daily. The concern comes after a resident in Bwondha Village, Malongo Sub-county, was attacked for allegedly rejecting to give part of his land to his son. Ms Nakamya said private developers encroach on community land and some evict people from their land. Ms Nakamya urged residents to report land conflicts to local authorities instead of taking the law in their hands. [Malik Fahad Jjingo]

Leaders deny selling land

LIRA: Lira Municipal authorities have denied claims that they have sold off parking yard of African Development Bank-funded Lira Main market to a businessman. Councillors from the Central Division had alleged that the municipal sold off the parking yard at the southern part of the market to Mr Geoffrey Etwop. The town clerk, Mr Assy Abirebe, last week said Mr Etwop in November last year requested that he should use the parking yard since it is close to his construction project. Mr Etwop said the authorities also granted him permission to beautify the parking yard; something which he said prompted him to pull down the wall fence. [Isaac Otwii]

Banyoro defend Kasaija

KIBAALE: A section of youth and politicians in Bunyoro Sub-region have launched a campaign termed as "Defend Kasaija to promote Bunyoro interests", which is aimed at saving Finance minister Matia Kasaija on the Shs700b probe. Former minister Kabakumba Masiko said Mr Kasaija must be supported and defended. This comes after Speaker Rebecca Kadaga last week ordered an investigation against Mr Kasaija and Secretary to the Treasury Keith Muhakanizi for allegedly bungling Shs700b government money, and suspended any debate on the parliamentary recommendations to censure the duo over the same matter. [Ismail Bategeka]

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