

NEW PRESS CAN PRINT 70,000 16-PAGE ANSWER BOOKLETS PER HOUR



Odongo shows Mrs Museveni part of the UNEB web offset printer during the commissioning of the printery yesterday. Photo by Richard Sanya

New printer gives UNEB more control over exams

By Pascal Kwasiga

The Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) has tightened its control over examinations following the acquisition of a state-of-the-art printing press that will enable the institution print all question papers at its printery.

The First Lady and education minister, Mrs Janet Museveni, yesterday commissioned the \$3.8m (sh13b) equipment recently installed at the exam body's printing facility in Kyambogo, a Kampala suburb.

Manufactured in India, the machine has replaced the old one, which was made in Germany.

UNEB started printing exams and answer booklets in 2007, but it continued paying firms for printing services due to the low capacity of its machine. However, the examination institution exercised limited control over exams printed outside its printing press.

According to UNEB, the new printing press can print as much as 70,000 16-page examination answer booklets in a space of an hour, although manufacturers recommend 35,000.

The old machine, which was acquired through a \$2m (sh7.2b) World Bank loan, has

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been printing about 10,000 in the same time.

At the launch of the printing press, attended by over 50 UNEB staff, Mrs Museveni noted that the number of national examinations candidates has been growing due to the existence of free education services, resulting in increased demand for printing services by the Board.

"I am pleased that this modern high-speed printer is now facilitating UNEB to handle challenges of increased printing volumes as envisaged by the Government in the implementation of UPPEP (Uganda Post-Primary Education and Training)," she stated.

The new machine has been procured with funds provided under UPPEP. The web offset printing press, which

has replaced the sheet-fed machine, has also enhanced efficiency by eliminating some of the processes associated with the (sheet fed) printing facilities.

The cutting-edge machine trims the papers from a large roll of paper into recommended sizes and binds the pages before printing the booklet. For the sheet-fed offset machines, slicing pages, folding, binding and printing are performed manually.

The latest printery, Mrs Museveni stated, will enable UNEB print all examination papers within its printing facility and have direct control over the printing processes.

"The technical quality of exam papers is assured by, among others, the ability of the examination body to do quality assurance and control during

the production of question papers and other exam materials used by candidates," she added.

UNEB, she noted, now possesses a fairly large capacity for printing services and that the machine should be an important revenue stream to plug some funding gaps.

The UNEB executive secretary, Dan Odongo, said the introduction of free primary and secondary education in 1997 and 2007 respectively, increased printing work for the institution.

"UNEB tried some existing printing companies then and the initial results were disastrous. The new machine is a two-in-one, with each unit capable of running independently," he added.

The examinations body chief appealed to the Government to provide more funds to establish storage facilities for papers on which the institution prints exams and pick the total wage bill for UNEB staff.

The UNEB board chair, Prof. Mary Okwakol, said the printing speed has increased after the acquisition of the new machine and the equipment has addressed security challenges associated with printing exam papers outside the institution's printery.