

Government to consult parents on school feeding

By Pascal Kwesiga

In a poem, six pupils of Kitunga Primary School in Ntungamo district spoke glowingly of the impact the milk they receive for breakfast has had on their learning.

During the high-level dialogue on parent/guardian-led school children feeding, the pupils praised the Kingdom of Netherlands, which is spearheading the milk for breakfast campaign at the school.

"Milk, milk, milk, you are a friend of my body. You have potassium....you are loved by everyone....," the healthy-looking pupils stated.

But there is a stark contrast between the Kitunga Primary School pupils and their peers in other parts of the country because they receive neither breakfast nor lunch at their schools.

The Kitunga pupils are beneficiaries of an initiative of the Netherlands to develop the dairy sector. Under the project implemented by the Netherlands Development Organisation, schools are supplied with milk by dairy farms. So far, 150 schools in Ntungamo, Bushenyi, Sheema, Kiruhura, Isingiro and Mbarara are benefiting from the scheme.

"Our idea was to promote the dairy sector and we realised we could do it better through schools. We brought the schools and dairy farms together and the milk market is growing. I think each pupil



Janet Museveni (left) flanked by Sseninde (second-left) and other guests at a stall that exhibited fortified foods. This was during the first National high-level policy dialogue on Parent/Guardian-Led School Feeding in Uganda at the President's office yesterday. Photo by Roderick Ahimbazwe

pays sh20,000 per term for breakfast (milk)," Rinus Van, the project manager, said.

As the education stakeholders met yesterday at the Office of the President conference hall in Kampala, they sought to get more

information about the project and establish if it could be replicated somewhere else.

In Gulu district, a new feeding option is also bearing fruit. The district education officer, Caesar Akena, said they have succeeded in

encouraging parents to either pack lunch or bring food items to school for their children through the Parent Teachers' Associations and school management committees.

"We had only two schools providing lunch to pupils last

year, but today, the number has increased to 22 out of 77 public schools. By end of 2018, all schools in Gulu will be providing meals," he stated.

National working group

After listening to the success stories from Ntungamo and Gulu, the First Lady and education minister, Mrs. Janet Museveni, inaugurated a national working group committee to study various feeding options for different regions and spearhead the campaign for parents/guardians to feed their children at school. It will also consult parents on how they would want to feed their children at school and the kind of assistance they need.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ A committee to study various feeding options for different regions and spearhead the campaign for parents/guardians to feed their children at school was inaugurated.

The committee, which will be chaired by the director for basic and secondary education,

Nsumba Lyaazi, will include more representatives from the education, agriculture, health, gender, labour and social development, and water and environment ministries. Other representatives will come

from the National Planning Authority (NPA), Kyambogo and Makerere universities, World Food Programme, Food and Agriculture Organisation, Netherlands and USAID. The committee begins work with immediate effect.

The minister reiterated that it is unacceptable for parents to fail to pack food for their children in this era when their counterparts who lived in Uganda under politically volatile circumstances did so.

"We need to mobilise our communities and tell them this is unacceptable. You cannot bring children into the world and fail to look after them in a blessed country like Uganda," Mrs. Museveni said.

The minister explained that failure by the parents to feed their children at school continues to "constrain the achievements" of the education sector.

About nine million pupils are said to be in primary schools in Uganda, but the ones in public schools are receiving poor quality education, partly because they attend school on empty stomachs. Many miss school due to hunger.

"We are failing the children and the future of the country. The status quo must change," she added.

The state minister for primary education, Rosemary Sseninde, said a recent study indicates that 66% of the children are not learning because of the absence of food.