

UPE bears more fruit



The pupil-classroom and pupil-teacher ratios have improved to 69:1 and 54:1 respectively. The target is 45:1

BY GEOFFREY MUTEGEKI

When Rita Namukose emerged the overall best performing student at Makerere University's 70th graduation, few people knew that she was a product of Universal Primary Education (UPE).

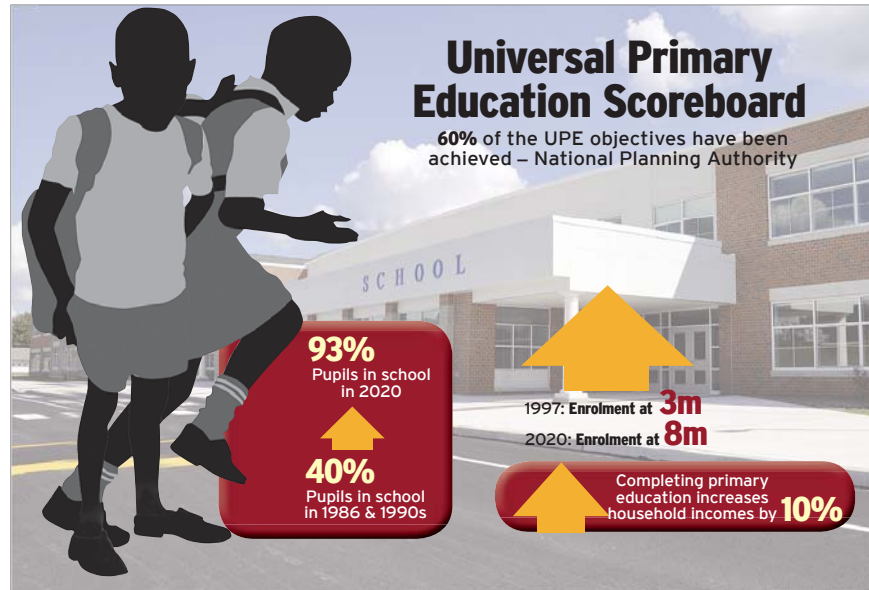
Namukose, who attained a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 4.92, sat her Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) at Kiwafu Primary School in Wakiso district in 2009.

Another UPE product, Sarah Namayengo, emerged best student in science courses with a CGPA of 4.83 in bachelor of conservation forestry and product technology. Namayengo sat her PLE at Kyagwe Road Primary School, a UPE school in 2009.

In primary Namayengo scored aggregate 16, in O'level, she got aggregate 11 and pursued biology chemistry, math and ICT plus General Paper, where she got 17 points, qualifying her for an automatic entry to Makerere on Government sponsorship.

The headteacher of Kiwafu Primary School, Rita Rose Namulumba, upon receiving the news, said the performance of Namukose encourages them to focus on performing their duties without hearkening to negative comments on UPE schools.

"This gives us more energy to teach, regardless of the negative comments people make about UPE schools' performance. I encourage UPE headteachers



GRAPHIC BY CYNTHIA NANKUMBA



The Government has invested more than sh2 trillion in the realisation of UPE and (USE) since the inception of the programmes — State Minister of Finance for Planning, David Bahati.

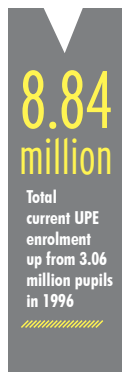
not to be discouraged," Namulumba said.

UPE STARTS

UPE changed Uganda's education fortunes when it started in 1997.

It was introduced in January 1997, following a commitment by President Yoweri Museveni that the Government would meet the cost of primary education of four children per family.

This commitment was soon extended to allow all people that wanted to



access primary education to do so.

"The NRM knew that many families could not pay for education. That is why we introduced "Bonna Basomele bwerere", Universal Primary Education in 1997. Many children came into schools," said President Museveni in his New Year's address on December 31, 2019.

Uganda was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to introduce USE. One of the greatest

achievements of UPE was the substantial increment in primary schools' enrollment from around three million to over five million children in 1997, to today's over eight million.

IN THE 1970S

Political crises in the 1970s and 1980s had reversed the progress achieved by the education sector in Uganda since independence.

By 1985, the level of government expenditure on education was about 27% of what it had been in the 1970s.

Due to high costs to families, the gross primary enrolment rate

stayed relatively constant for two decades after independence. It stood at 50% in 1980, the same rate as it was in 1960.

NUMBERS UP

Because of UPE, the number of children attending primary school has grown from about 3.06 million pupils in 1996 to about 8.84 million in 2017, with more girls going to school for the very first time than before.

"The headteachers and some small local groups have been bringing back-to-school charges. I do not agree with this because many children are expelled from



“Although, the Government strives to ensure that every child goes to school, we are facing numerous challenges, with majority originating from parents, who have forgotten their roles,” — minister of Education and Sports Mrs Janet Kataha Museveni.

The minister of Education and Sports Mrs Janet Kataha Museveni (right) receiving the 2019 PLE results from the UNEB chairperson Mary Okwakol and UNEB secretary Daniel Odongo at Kampala Parents' School

UPE and USE schools. I am calling on the NRM leaders in the villages to stop this,” Museveni said in his address.

The President further highlighted that one of the issues affecting the masses is education, but said UPE is doing well. “Universal Primary Education and Universal Secondary Education have raised the level of literacy from 43% to 75%. However, there are still skills gaps for many of these youth, jobs, wealth creation and, sometimes, discipline,” Museveni said.

OTHER MILESTONES

Under infrastructure, there are now over 160,000 classrooms compared to 45,000 that existed at the start of UPE in 1997. Additionally, there has been a scaling-up of libraries and latrines.

This has improved the pupil-classroom and pupil-teacher ratios to 69:1 and 54:1, respectively. The target is 45:1.

Another 138 primary schools have been planned through the Uganda Teacher and School Effectiveness Project.

Under the programme, each of the schools will get seven classrooms, one administration block, two blocks of five-stance latrines for boys and girls and one block of two-stance latrines for teachers.

With UPE, there is increased access to primary education by the poor, whereby 20% poorest households now have as high enrollment as the 20% richest households; with 84% to 85% respective access to primary education, according to a 2004 World Bank study.



A pupil at Bukedea Primary School washing her hands after visiting the toilet

Large quantities of learning materials have been supplied in schools which reduced the pupil-textbook ratio.

In 1993, there were 37 pupils per book, compared to today's 3:1 for P3 and P4, for core subjects. Millions of three-seater desks have been supplied to pupils and over 5,000 pieces of furniture for school offices.

Commenting on the achievements of UPE, the First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Janet Museveni, asked parents and teachers to ensure zero school drop-out.

She said that mechanisms should be devised to reduce the rising primary school drop-out rates in the country.

“Although, the Government strives to ensure that every child goes to school, we are facing

EDUCATION ACT

According to the Education Act, 2008, the responsibilities of the parents and guardians shall include registering their children to school, providing them with food, clothing, shelter, medical care and transport, while government shall be responsible for financing of education through fees, grants, learning and instructional materials, teachers' welfare, among others.

numerous challenges, with majority originating from parents, who have forgotten their roles,” Mrs Museveni said in a statement read by Rosemary Sseninde, the state minister for primary education at the launch of Zero

Dropout (ZERO) initiative in Kampala recently.

ZERO DROPOUTS

ZERO is an initiative of headteachers of Universal Primary Education (UPE) schools and Uganda Teachers Association Volunteer (UYA), aimed at seeking interventions in controlling primary school dropout rates.

The drop-out rate in the country is at 42.8%, with over half of the number of female pupils that join primary not completing.

FINANCING

According to the state minister of finance for planning, David Bahati, the Government has invested more than sh2 trillion in the realisation of UPE and (USE) since the inception of the

programmes.

Bahati says the NRM government will continue to ensure the right of access to education for all its citizens as clearly spelt out in the objectives of the UPE policy.

He said government is pursuing a people-centered development agenda because human resource is the greatest asset for Uganda.

Government has invested about sh990b in the implementation of UPE and sh926b in the actualisation of USE.

Bahati also thanked the National Planning Authority for the timely assessment taken to review the implementation of the UPE policy since its inception in 1997

According to the report presented by the National Planning Authority Executive Director, Joseph Muvawala, 60% of the UPE objectives have been achieved.

About 93% of primary school-age children in equal gender proportions are enrolled in school, compared to only 40% in 1986 and early 90s.

The report also states that the UPE policy has positively impacted on household incomes. Other wellbeing indicators, such as completing seven years of primary education, increases household incomes by 10.2%.

The report concludes that the UPE policy has been fundamental in achieving key educational goals since its inception in 1997.

LUNCH INITIATIVE

Under UPE, the Government is supposed to pay tuition while parents provide lunch, scholastic materials and uniform for their children.

However, in most cases, parents have left this responsibility to government. Mrs Janet Museveni has urged parents to ensure that they provide lunch for their children in schools.

She said the failure of parents to feed their children at home and in schools continues to affect the performance of those children and national development.