



Charles Owiny

BACKGROUND: Schools inadequate in the Karamoja sub-region

Charles Owiny, the Abim district inspector of schools, says the situation is not any different in Abim and other districts in the sub-region.

He says Abim, with an estimated population of 121,900, has a large number of

school drop-outs.

The district has 34 government-aided primary schools, 12 community schools and five private primary schools. Out of the 12, six are functional and six are non-functional.

Owiny adds that there are seven parishes without primary schools. He named the parishes as Loyoroit, Oringowelo, Agwata, Angwee, Oyaro, Barlyech and Kobulin.

He also says the district only has four secondary schools, of

which three are government-aided and one privately owned.

Owiny further explains that there are four sub-counties without secondary schools – Magamaga, Awach, Abim and Nyakwae.

He adds that the district has

only one technical school, making it hard for students who wish to get vocational skills. “You can imagine the suffering in the areas with no secondary school. They have to trek long distances and this kills the morale,” he explains.

Lokote has repeated the class four times due to lack of school fees

By Hope Mafaranga

“You have no idea what we girls go through in this region to attain education. Someone needs to understand the dynamics of Karamoja and the things parents pay attention to and regard as priorities. There are many priorities here and education is not one of them,” says Esther Lokote, a Primary Seven pupil of Nakoreto Primary School in Kotido district.

“All what my parents see in me are cows and grandchildren. They do not want to see me progress to secondary school,” she says.

Struggle for support

Lokote, who pays her school fees, says she has repeated Primary Seven four times because she cannot afford to proceed to secondary school. No one has so far come to her rescue, despite several appeals.

She pays sh21,000 per term, which she earns during holidays on working as a house help.

Lokote has been passing Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) since 2014, but, because she does not want to be married off, she is forced to repeat to keep away from the eyes of her parents who she says want her married.

“I have been passing, but I do not have the money to proceed to secondary school. I am now reading so hard and praying to God to get aggregates four so that I can get a sponsor,” the 16-year-old says.

She says most of peers are now mothers because their parents looked at them as her a source of wealth.

“I cannot go back to my village because I will be forced into marriage. Moreover parents do not even seek our consent. I have to continue struggling until I attain my goal of becoming a nurse. I believe God will one day will bring an angel to support me,” she says.

Charles Owiny, the Abim district inspector of schools, says parents have a negative attitude towards the education of the girlchild.

Vivian Lochoro, another pupil, says the safest place for girls is school, saying parents value animals more than girls. “A girlchild is basically prepared to become a wife. We have to stand up for our rights,” she says.

Lochoro thanked the Government for introducing the boarding government-aided primary schools in Karamoja to protect them.

She, however, says it is not enough because after completing primary school, those who are lucky to have completed, do not go far due to lack of money. “The Government and other partners should do more to ensure the girl makes it all the way to tertiary level,” she said.

Survival rate

Owiny says one of the biggest challenges the district is facing is the ability of pupils who enrol in primary

Girl reseats P.7 to avoid early MARRIAGE



Nakoreto Primary School Advocacy Club. Photos by Paul Watala

EDUCATION NOT PRIORITY

The Kotido district LC5 chairperson, Ambrose Lotukei, says going to school in Karamoja has not been prioritised. He says when he was young, he had to be forced by soldiers of the Idi Amin government to go to school. In a sad voice, the district boss, who also served as the district education officer for 11 years, says his parents often picked him from school and hid him in granary to prevent him from studying.

school to complete Primary Seven. He says in 2009, 2,119 boys and 2,147 girls enrolled, but only 719 boys and 469 girls were able to complete Primary Seven.

He cited 2010 as another year that saw the number of pupils failing to complete primary school dropping.

“We enrolled 2,194 boys and 4,279 girls, but only 682 boys and 549 girls sat for Primary Leaving Examinations,” he said, adding that the drop-out rates are relatively higher among girls, compared to boys.

Owiny said the survival rate of boys from 2009 to date is 34% and girls 22%, overall 28%. He cited poverty, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, petty businesses, negative attitudes,

bad cultural beliefs, domestic chores, teasing, peer influence, poor performance, lack of role models, lack of guidance and counselling and child neglect as the leading causes of the high school drop-out rate.

Solutions

Charles Owiny, the Abim district inspector of schools says the situation has left the district lagging behind.

His comments were emphasised by George William Kiberu, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Uganda programmes manager in charge of northern Karamoja, who said they running awareness campaigns to change the trend. “We organise radio talk



Esther Lokote

shows on early marriage and teenage pregnancies and discuss issues affecting adolescents,” he says.

Kiberu says with funding from DANIDA, they have also created School Advocacy Clubs to provide child-friendly spaces where children identify challenges that affect their education.

Kiberu said other stakeholders such as Straight Talk Foundation and some political leaders are teaming up to award the best performing candidates in PLE.

The clubs, according to Kiberu, go to the community and look for children who have dropped out of school, use music, dance and drama and take part in go-back-to-school campaigns.

The clubs also sensitise parents on the danger of early marriages, teenage pregnancies and HIV/AIDS.

What others say



HEADTEACHER

Scovia Akidi, headteacher Barlyech Primary School

We opted to volunteer to help children go to school after attending a meeting organised by ADRA Uganda. During these meetings we noticed that no one else will solve our problems.



DIRECTOR

Solomon Katereggea, programmes director ADRA

Stone quarries, small businesses such as selling meat and early marriages are the biggest hindrance to education Karamoja. The Government and other stakeholders need to regulate this.



LEGISLATOR

Hilary Lokwang, MP Ike County, Kaabong

It is a mindset that we need to change so that parents see the importance of education. Some of us who have made it are acting as role models to ensure education improves in Karamoja.