

Govt should prioritise housing for teachers

This week, this newspaper ran a story of teachers in a Kampala primary school who sleep in classrooms.

Speaking at a recent commissioning of a Shs300m multipurpose hall donated to Mbuya Primary School by the Classic Leader Foundation, the head teacher, Mr Jonathan Mukinusu, expressed appreciation for the donation and reinforced the plea for teacher housing, revealing that some staff have been forced to sleep in classrooms.

"About six teachers and two support staff sleep in classrooms. The issue of teachers' accommodation has been long overdue. Some travel long distances to access the school," he said.

The issue:

Teachers' housing.

Our view:

Government should champion public-private partnerships. Just like the case in Mbuya, this can be through philanthropy or by allowing private investors to build staff quarters on school land, which the government then rents for teachers.

This is symbolic of a bigger problem of teacher welfare that has run in our education system for a long time. At the beginning of the Third Term, teachers under their umbrella body, the Uganda National Teachers' Union (Unatu), laid down their tools for more than a month over the government's failure to enhance the salaries of arts and primary teachers.

Besides the little or sometimes delayed payment, the other major challenge that the teachers face is the issue of welfare. Most schools do not have accommodation for the teachers, forcing many to commute from far distances, or, like the Mbuya Primary School, find degrading ways of living to avoid rent and transport.

President Museveni has pledged to build houses for teachers, the most recent commitment coming in July during the arts teachers' strike over delayed salary enhancement. The promise is part of the government's strategy to improve teacher welfare.

But the government needs to treat the matter of teachers' accommodation with urgency. The government in this financial year reduced its allocation to the education sector despite the glaring demands across the sector. More money should be allocated specifically for teachers' housing.

The government should also continuously review the criteria for determining hard-to-reach allowances so that more teachers can be motivated. This will, in the long term, increase teacher retention, especially in the post-Covid era where many teachers are opting for other opportunities.

Finally, the government should champion public-private partnerships. Just like the case in Mbuya, this can be through philanthropy or by allowing private investors to build staff quarters on school land, which the government then rents for teachers.

Until the issue of teachers' welfare is addressed, the absenteeism and late arrival vice will not end.