

# Museveni told to fully actualise free UPE, USE

BY RAJAB MUKOMBOZI

**MBARARA.** The National Resistance Movement (NRM) chairperson for Mbarara District, Mr Prosper Tuhaise Kururagire, has appealed to President Museveni to fulfil his longstanding pledge to make Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) completely free for all learners.

Speaking at Boma Grounds in Mbarara City at the weekend during Mr Museveni's joint campaign rallies for Mbarara District and Mbarara City, Mr Tuhaise said despite the government's introduction of UPE in 1997 and USE in 2007, many families still struggle to keep their children in school due to hidden charges.

"We thank you for the UPE and USE programmes, but some sub-counties do not have government secondary schools (seed schools). We also want you to make education in these government schools totally free. Some of your children will miss out on school if this is not done because poverty remains deep at the grassroots," Mr Tuhaise said.

He further added that insufficient government funding has forced some schools to levy informal charges, locking out children from poor households. Currently, the government allocates only Shs20,000 per pupil per year under UPE—a figure education stakeholders say is inadequate to run a functional school.

## Museveni's response

In response, President Museveni acknowledged the gaps and reaffirmed his commitment to eliminating all financial barriers to education in public schools.

"I am happy with the concern raised by my son Kururagire to support my commitment to totally free education in government schools. In our new government, we have to make sure this is put into practice. Our people need to be supported to access quality education without barriers," Mr Museveni said.

Leaders in the Ankole Sub-region have repeatedly criticised the low capitation grants and poor staffing levels in government schools. Ankole Diocese Bishop, Rt Rev Sheldon Mwesigwa, recently warned that UPE and USE cannot meet quality standards unless significantly funded.

"The money given is too little. Teachers are few, infrastructure is lacking, and the learning environment is poor. You cannot provide quality education under such conditions," Bishop Mwesigwa said.

Mr Ambrose Muhimbura, a retired teacher and parent, argued that while government policies have improved access to education, communities need to appreciate the financial realities.

"You hear each child is paid for Shs20,000 under UPE every year—what can this do? Parents must support these schools if our children are to get quality and impactful education," he said, adding that government should avoid using UPE and USE as political tools.