

# Katakwi leaders push for hard-to-reach status to tackle teacher shortage

BY JANE NAFULA

**KATAKWI.** Leaders in Katakwi District have renewed calls for the government to classify the area as hard-to-reach and hard-to-stay, arguing that such a move would help address the persistent shortage of teachers.

District chairperson Geoffrey Omolo said limited deployment and retention of qualified teachers remain one of the biggest obstacles to improving education outcomes in the district.

“Education is a fundamental driver of sustainable development, playing a pivotal role in transforming communities socially and economically,” Mr Omolo told *Daily Monitor* on Wednesday. “That’s why we need to put in place special incentives like those offered to our neighbours in Karamoja, if we are to attract and retain teachers here.”

Under the current government policy, public servants posted to hard-to-reach and hard-to-stay areas such as Karamoja Sub-region receive a hardship allowance of up to 30 percent above the national salary scale to compensate for difficult working conditions.

Mr Omolo argued that although Katakwi is not geographically part of Karamoja, it faces similar challenges that make it unattractive to skilled personnel.

“What distinguishes Katakwi from the Karamoja Sub-region is only geographical boundaries. The conditions that define hard-to-reach areas are lived realities in our communities,” he said while addressing residents at IJB Junior School in Katakwi Town Council on Wednesday.

District records indicate that Katakwi has 78 primary schools and 10 secondary schools, but is facing a teacher deficit of about 600. In some schools, the teacher-to-pupil ratio stands at 1:91, far above the national average of about 1:45.

## Private actor intervenes

Despite the challenges, some private investors are venturing into the area with a focus on transformation.

Ms Judith Ineke, the proprietor and director of IJB Junior School, said her decision to invest in the district was driven by social entrepreneurship rather than quick financial returns.

“The social entrepreneurship spirit of empowering young people to fully explore their academic potential, rath-

er than primarily focusing on reaping fast returns on investment, is the motive that drove us,” she said.

Ms Ineke, a Kampala resident, said her education vision targets Katakwi and neighbouring Kapelebyong districts, where her foundation has established nursery and primary schools.

Plans are underway to expand into secondary education within two years and eventually into tertiary institutions, focusing on science and technology.

She noted the stark disparities in education performance between urban and remote districts.

“You find a single school in Wakiso producing more first grades than all schools in a remote district combined. Yet all children are born with equal capabilities. The difference lies in access to opportunity,” Ms Ineke said.

To address staff retention challenges, the school plans to provide teach-

ers with accommodation and essential domestic amenities to make their stay more comfortable and affordable.

While commissioning St Jeremiah Nursery and Primary School in Kapelebyong District, at the weekend, District Education Officer Stephen Olinga said: “We invite more investors in education; there is guaranteed security...Such developments empower our children with literacy and numeracy skills, but they also create business and job opportunities for residents.”

According to the Kapelebyong District Development Plan (2020/2021–2024/2025), the adult literacy rate in the district stands at 60.2 percent, below the national average of 72.2 percent.

Leaders said unless targeted incentives are introduced to attract and retain teachers, efforts to uplift education standards in Katakwi and similar districts may continue facing setbacks.

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