

# Auditor General illuminates telling gaps in USE schools

The latest report shows that 136 schools had no science laboratories at all, while 182 schools lacked libraries, and 233 had libraries without essential books.

BY YAHUDUKITUNZI

**A**cross Uganda, students are struggling to learn science without laboratories, read without libraries, and study in overcrowded classrooms under leaking roofs. Teachers often commute long distances due to a lack of housing, while learners are forced to use condemned pit latrines and sit in rooms with cracked walls that threaten their safety.

These challenges are not isolated inconveniences but interconnected failures that erode the quality of education and weaken the promise of Universal Secondary Education (USE). The vision of equitable access to quality secondary schooling is being undermined by the very environment in which students are expected to thrive.

The Auditor General's latest report lays bare the scale of the crisis. Covering 157 Local Governments across the country, the report documented widespread deficiencies: missing laboratories, empty libraries, overcrowded classrooms, unsafe sanitation, dilapidated roofs, and structural dangers. Together, these findings expose a nationwide infrastructure breakdown demanding urgent reform and investment.

The report revealed that 136 schools had no science laboratories at all, while 270 had laboratories that were inadequately equipped. Similarly, 182 schools lacked libraries, and 233 had libraries without essential books.

The report also found that 251 schools had no teacher accommodation facilities. At the same time, 380 schools reported inadequate classroom facilities, leading to overcrowding. In some schools, classrooms designed for 40 students were hosting 80 or more.

Sanitation facilities were another area of grave concern. In 233 schools, condemned pit latrines were still in use.

Meanwhile, 237 schools had very old and damaged iron sheets on their roofs.

"Without laboratories, science subjects are reduced to abstract theory, leaving students ill-prepared for examinations and future careers in medicine, engineering, and technology," Mr Job Kalenzi, a science education specialist, told *Sunday Monitor*.

He said libraries are vital for independent study, research, and nurturing a reading culture. "Their absence forces students to rely solely on teachers' notes, limiting their ability to explore topics in depth or develop critical thinking skills. Together, the lack of laboratories and libraries erodes the foundation of learning and undermines Uganda's ambition to produce well-rounded graduates."

## Egregious deficits

The Auditor General's report highlights deeper systemic issues: enrollment growth under USE has far outpaced infrastructure development;



## GOVT GUIDELINES

According to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) lower secondary curriculum and Uganda National Examinations Board (Uneb) guidelines, practical experiments form a core component of science education. Students are examined not only on theory but also on practical understanding. However, visits to some government secondary schools reveal a troubling reality: many schools either lack laboratories entirely or have empty structures without equipment, chemicals, gas, water, or safety facilities. In some schools, so-called "labs" are ordinary classrooms renamed for inspection purposes.

"We were told the lab will come later," said a Physics teacher in Sironko District, who requested anonymity to avoid disciplinary action. "But we have been teaching here. Nothing has come."

maintenance culture is weak, with repairs deferred until facilities become hazardous; and funding mechanisms remain fragmented, with unclear accountability between central and local authorities.

The report calls for urgent action, including increased capital investment, decentralised funding to empower Local Governments to address immediate infrastructural needs; regular maintenance programmes to prevent facilities from deteriorating to dangerous levels; teacher housing schemes to improve retention and performance; and monitoring and accountability mechanisms to track progress and hold responsible officers accountable.

Mr Fagil Mande, a renowned educationist, says structures such as district inspectors of schools, sub-county chiefs, education officers, and chief administrative officers (CAOs) are not fulfilling their responsibilities. "These officials should have identified these problems earlier so that they were resolved before the start of the school term. We are not inspecting schools enough. During my time at the Ministry of Educa-

Students of Madinah Islamic Secondary School Nsangi during a practical lesson in the science laboratory at the school. Across Uganda, students are struggling to learn science without laboratories. PHOTO/FILE

tion and Sports, the ministry had developed clear requirements and minimum standard indicators—things that must be in schools, including laboratories and libraries. I believe this is what the Auditor General is now using."

Mr Mande also pointed to the issue of school fees. "During presidential campaigns, the President himself complained about how school fees affect government schools. Yet the new term has opened without clear guidance on what fees should be paid. Those responsible for guiding us are silent."

Mr Sabiti Makara, a professor in the Department of Governance and Director of Graduate Training at Kabale University, said the law expressly states that a secondary school without a laboratory and library should not be commissioned or licensed.

"How are schools without laboratories and libraries allowed to be commissioned and licensed? How can a school operate with cracked walls, without a pit latrine, and still be permitted to function? This is a big question," he said.

## Pedagogical crisis

Dr Juma Kakuba Sultan, a senior lecturer and graduate coordinator in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences at Kyambogo University, noted that while the government has consistently emphasised science, the question remains whether it truly walks the talk.

"They have tried to put structures in place, but are these structures functional? For example, we have the Ministry of Science and Technology, which is supposed to work hand in hand with the Ministry of Education and Sports to promote sciences in schools. Are these priorities reflected in our national budget?" he rhetorically asked.

Mr Kakuba added: "The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and Sports should present a compre-

hensive plan that can be submitted to the Ministry of Finance, ensuring that all government-aided schools have functional laboratories, libraries, classrooms, and other facilities. Where is this comprehensive plan? I don't see it."

The academic stressed that there must be follow-up when the President makes pronouncements. He, however, the government's long stay in power has led to a loss of focus and control. "I think the next government will need to revamp the [Education] ministry, bringing in young blood who can go to the field and check on these schools."

Site visits would show that housing for teachers is, said Dr Kakuba, "in a sorry state, and this has affected teachers' morale." Teachers, he added, "need decent housing to make them love their work."

Mr Moses Wagwe, an educationist, said the Auditor General's report is more than a list of deficiencies; it is a wake up call.

"Uganda's USE schools are operating in environments that stifle learning and endanger lives. Unless urgent reforms and investments are made, the vision of universal, quality secondary education will remain elusive. The challenges—missing laboratories, empty libraries, overcrowded classrooms, unsafe sanitation, dilapidated roofs, and cracked walls—are interconnected, forming a web of neglect that traps students and teachers alike," Mr Wagwe said.

He explained that the future of Uganda's learners depends on whether this wake up call is heeded. "The laboratory crisis deepens inequality in Uganda's education system. Urban elite schools boast modern labs with digital equipment, while rural government schools struggle to provide even basic apparatus like test tubes or microscopes."

Ms Judith Mutesi, a teacher, said students are expected to identify laboratory apparatus they have never touched, describe experiments they have never

conducted, and interpret results they have only seen in textbooks.

"Students in a government-aided secondary school in the country are enrolled in Chemistry, Physics and Biology—yet their schools have no functional science laboratory," Ms Mutesi told *Sunday Monitor*.

She added: "Children read experiments on the blackboard. The teacher explains and draws diagrams. That is all—This experience reflects a silent but widespread crisis in Uganda's education system: government secondary schools teaching science subjects without laboratories, despite national curriculum requirements that make practical work compulsory."

## STI hot air?

President Museveni has repeatedly reaffirmed emphasis on Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI), saying they are at the heart of Uganda's development agenda.

On June 14, 2025, during celebrations marking the 75th anniversary of Mbale Secondary School—one of Uganda's oldest educational institutions—President Museveni, represented by the State minister for Karamoja Affairs, Ms Florence Nambozo, called on parents and teachers to help learners make informed decisions in choosing science subjects, noting that government policies already support students who excel in science through scholarships at public and private universities.

"Our goal is to ensure every student has access to world-class laboratories, practical training, and STEM-focused mentorship. This is how we equip a generation not just to pass exams, but to build bridges, write software, and practice robotics," the President said.

## 'Need to improve'

Science teachers said they are forced to improvise, often relying on chalkboard illustrations, verbal explanations, or improvised materials that fall far below standard. Some teachers admit skipping practical topics altogether, focusing instead on theory-heavy sections they believe students can at least attempt during examinations.

The impact of laboratory shortages is reflected in poor performance in science subjects, particularly in rural government schools.

Education analysts noted that failure rates in Chemistry and Physics remain consistently higher than in Arts subjects, widening inequality between students in well-funded urban or private schools and those in government-aided rural institutions.

A chief administrative officer (CAO) in one of the districts in Busoga Sub-region, who requested anonymity, said the deficiencies stem from inadequate funding.

"The capital development in secondary schools is handled by the Ministry of Education and Sports, leaving Local Governments with limited capacity to address infrastructural gaps. This division of responsibility has created a bottleneck, where schools continue to deteriorate while awaiting central government interventions that are slow or insufficient," the CAO said.

Parents, many of whom sacrifice to send children to school under the promise of government-aided education, feel betrayed.

"We are told education is free. But our children are failing because schools have no facilities. Who is responsible? Some parents contribute money to buy chemicals or improvised equipment, but this often violates government policy against charging fees in USE schools," said Mr Patrick Wetaka, a parent.