

QUOTE OF THE DAY

First Deputy Prime Minister

"I emphasise that Ugandans must

EDITORIAL

Invest more in education of learners with special needs

The story in the *Daily Monitor* of April 2 about Emmanuel Pande, a visually impaired Senior Six vacationist who has so far authored and published two books, is quite an inspiration. With all the doom and gloom in the media, ranging from crime reports, deaths, corruption, misuse of public funds, floods, and destruction of property and the like, stories such as Pande's help to keep hope alive.

Pande, who sat for his Senior Six final examinations at Iganga Secondary School last year, lost his sight at one and a half years old due to an overdose of quinine administered for ma-

laria. He lost his mother at age five, and his grandfather took on the role of bringing him up since his father was reportedly absent.

In the story, it is said that he was introduced to literature when he joined Iganga Secondary School. With support from his teachers, he developed a passion for writing.

His first book, titled *Hundred Pieces of Gold*, is an anthology exploring themes such as wealth, leadership, artificial intelligence, change, human contribution, education, and time, and his second book is titled *Attitude: A master key to success*.

Pande says he was inspired by his grandfather, who never neglected him. In his words, "Most parents don't bother taking children like us to school. I wondered what inspired my grandfather to take me to school from primary level, picking me up during holidays, and investing so much."

Pande is also a public speaking coach, debate adjudicator, and aspires to become a lawyer. Pande is a testament to the need to invest even more in special needs education, a sector that remains highly wanting.

Joy Wamaluku, the Mbale District officer-in-charge of special needs education, says there are only 33 trained special needs teachers for 69 government aided primary and 16 secondary schools.

Therefore, investment can ensure that there are adequate facilities to enable learning for students with special needs

and equip, train, and pay more teachers for learners with special needs.

Adequate investment can also enable mindset change in societies where children with special needs are discriminated against and stigmatised.

Members of the community, especially parents, must be sensitised and encouraged to love children enough to give them a quality education and cater for their other needs, regardless of handicaps that afflict them. Stories such as Pande's can be used to enlighten and encourage the populace. The Ministry of Education should revise the state of the education sector for special needs learners and institutions and organisations whose objective is to enable the education of children with special needs should be supported.

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