

By John Masaba

Concerns about learners' transition from primary to secondary school have been raised after it was discovered that 1,208 sub-counties in Uganda lack a secondary school.

Out of 2,209 sub-counties and town councils across the country, 1,007 lack a government-aided secondary school, meaning over half have no government-aided secondary education facility.

The findings are contained in the Baseline Education Census (BEC) 2025 report released by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) on Thursday. The census, conducted between April and November last year in collaboration with the education ministry, aimed to generate comprehensive data on learners, teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as institutional characteristics to guide planning and policy.

First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, launched the survey in April last year.

UNEVEN ACCESS

According to the report, 1,716 sub-counties have at least one secondary school, while those without are 1,208. However, distribution remains highly uneven, with urban and better-served regions enjoying significantly better access than rural and hard-to-reach areas.

It noted that Uganda has an estimated 5,498 secondary schools, of which 1,484 are government-aided (27%), while the majority are privately owned. The country also has about 9.1 million learners across pre-primary, primary, secondary and non-tertiary institutions.

"When it comes to no secondary school at all, we have 1,208 sub-counties out of the 2,209, which is about 54.7%," UBOS executive director Dr Chris Mukiza said while presenting the findings.

He added that Uganda has over two million secondary school learners, totalling 2,008,133, with females accounting for 53.3%.

"This shows slightly higher female participation at this level," Mukiza said.

He added that 1,007 sub-counties lacked a government-aided secondary school entirely, meaning that where schools exist, many are privately owned and often less affordable for households.

REGIONAL DISPARITIES

According to the report, the Buganda region recorded the highest concentration of secondary schools, while Karamoja had the lowest.

OVER 1,200 SUB-COUNTIES WITHOUT SECONDARY SCHOOL



UBOS board: Byamugisha

The same pattern is reflected in private institutions, with Buganda leading and Karamoja lagging.

Bugisu was identified as a particularly underserved region, with 87 sub-counties lacking a secondary school and 110 without a government-aided secondary school.

Karamoja also recorded the lowest number of secondary learners, with 8,209 in government-aided schools compared to 745 in private schools.

The report also highlights continued pressure on secondary education infrastructure and staffing, with classroom overcrowding emerging as a persistent challenge in the country.

According to the findings, the average secondary school classroom in Uganda accommodates 45 learners, a figure that rises sharply in government-aided schools, where the average stands at about 60 learners per classroom, a situation that falls below internationally recommended standards.

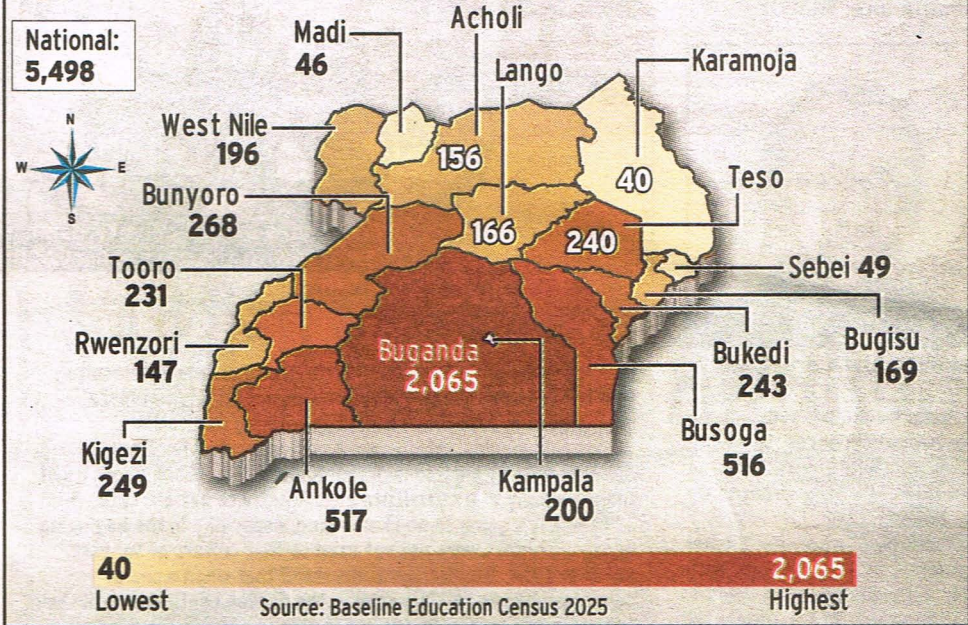
"The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation guidelines suggest a pupil-to-classroom ratio of between 25:1 and 30:1, which is considered optimal for effective teaching and learning," the report reads.

Overcrowding, according to the report, is straining teachers, limiting individual learner attention and undermining efforts to improve learning outcomes, particularly in already resource-constrained government-aided schools.

Although government-aided schools make up about 27% of all secondary schools, they account for 45% of total enrolment, reflecting higher pressure on government-aided institutions.

The census shows Uganda's

Distribution of secondary schools by sub-region



INSUFFICIENT SCHOOLS

Dr Kedrace Turyagenda, the education ministry permanent secretary, said although government-aided schools accounted for only about 27% of secondary schools visited in the study, they continue to absorb a disproportionately high number of learners – about 45% of student enrolment.

"This shows that the Government is doing a lot, even though government-aided schools are still few," Turyagenda said, adding that the pressure on government-aided institutions remains high due to limited infrastructure.

She also pointed to concerns about student transition rates, especially from O'level to A'level, noting a steep drop in numbers.

Turyagenda said while hundreds of thousands of learners sit for O'level examinations, only a much smaller number proceed to A'level, raising questions about progression and retention in the education system.

education system remains heavily dependent on private providers, especially at lower levels. Of the 38,347 pre-primary schools captured, only 3,193 are government-aided or attached to government-aided institutions.

Mukiza said the BEC census was intended to strengthen national planning by improving the quality and coverage of education data.

He said the exercise seeks "to strengthen the education management information system" by generating

reliable, nationwide statistics covering institutions, staffing, infrastructure and learning resources.

REACTIONS

The education ministry permanent secretary, Dr Kedrace Turyagenda, appreciated the completion of the data collection exercise, saying it had taken longer than initially expected but had finally delivered "timely and critical evidence" for government planning.

"This baseline data will

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The average enrolment in government-aided secondary school classrooms.

will help us and help the Government as you plan for the provision of education services and the targeting of the most needy areas in our country," Turyagenda said.

She emphasised that the Government's development agenda depends heavily on accurate and timely data, warning that effective planning and execution cannot be achieved without reliable statistics.

Turyagenda said Uganda is working within a broader national transformation agenda aimed at achieving a "modern and prosperous Uganda" by 2040.

The ministry official said the data would help policymakers better understand the relationship between population

distribution and education infrastructure, including the location of schools relative to communities.

She said this would help ensure that "nobody is intentionally marginalised," but rather that services are distributed based on where people live and the actual demand for education facilities.

Turyagenda said the findings revealed a significant imbalance in the education sector, particularly in the distribution of government-aided and private secondary schools.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Turyagenda underscored the importance of strengthening technical and vocational education and training (TVET), saying recent policy reforms are aimed at expanding skills development opportunities for learners who may not follow the purely academic pathway.

"We want to ensure access to skills for all people who need them," she said, adding that Uganda's TVET framework is intended to respond to labour market demands in a rapidly changing global economy.

Turyagenda said the ministry is now preparing to integrate the new data into the upcoming strategic planning cycle, which will guide interventions over the next government planning period.

She said the education sector must increasingly rely on data-driven decision-making to address gaps in access, equity and quality.

"Transformation does not happen just because we have resources," Turyagenda said. "It happens when the products of the education system have the right competencies, values and attitudes to translate learning into real development outcomes."

UBOS board chairperson Dr Albert Byamugisha described education as a key driver of national transformation, citing Universal Primary Education (UPE), introduced in 1997, and Universal Secondary Education (USE), rolled out in 2007, as landmark policies.

Byamugisha said UPE expanded enrolment from about 2.5 million to over eight million learners within a few years, while USE significantly widened access to secondary education for rural and low-income households.

However, he pointed to gaps in the census, particularly the absence of data from universities and tertiary institutions.

Michael Wanyama, who heads the Higher Education Students Financing Board, also said the omission of tertiary data remains a limitation.