

BY FRED WAMBEDE

KAPCHORWA. Pupils from the hilly district of Kapchorwa in Sebei sub-region continue to face obstacles in their pursuit of education.

Key challenges include teacher shortages and absenteeism, inadequate classrooms, and a lack of reading and instructional materials. These factors have steadily undermined learning outcomes over the years.

The findings are contained in the 2024 Kapchorwa District Report Card, conducted by Uwezo in partnership with the Kapchorwa Civil Society Organisations Alliance (KACSOA).

The assessment, carried out between June and August this year, evaluated 668 children aged four years and above from 300 households, focusing on basic English literacy and numeracy skills.

The report was released on Monday. The findings show that only 25 percent of pupils from Primary Three to Primary Seven are competent in both English and Mathematics. The report also found that most Primary Three pupils were unable to handle Primary Two-level work.

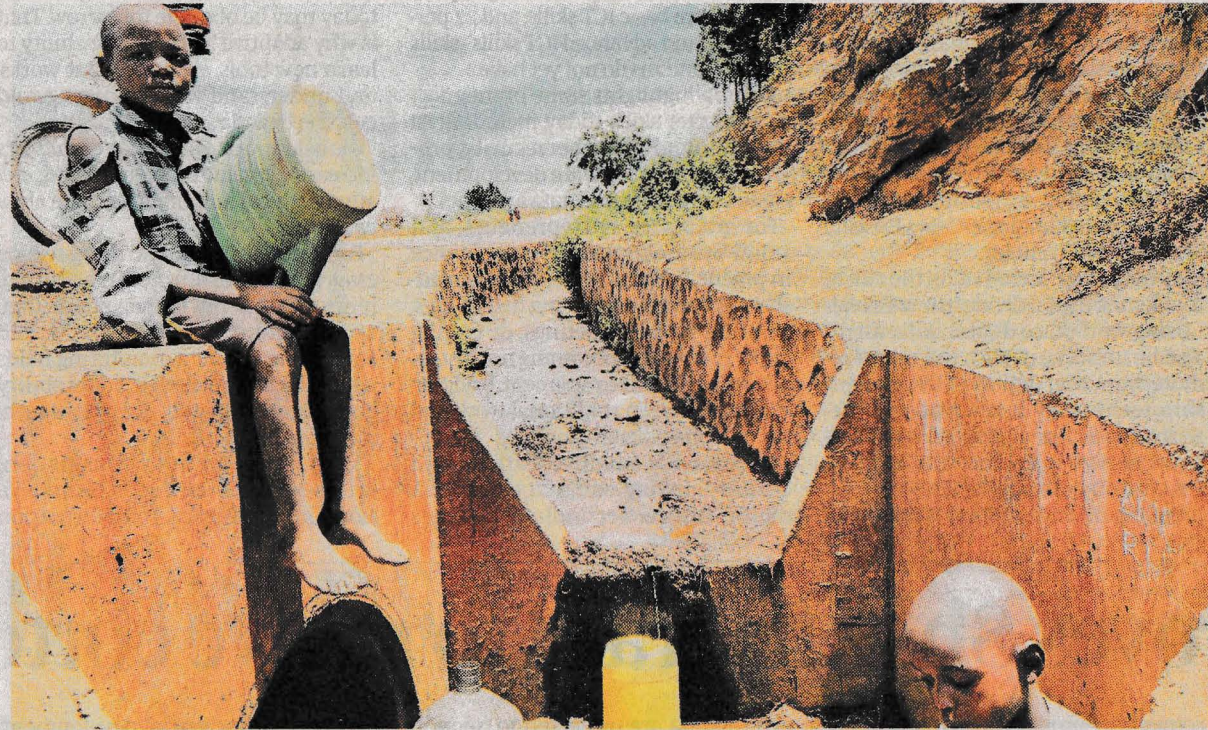
Mr Robert Cheptoe, the executive director of KACSOA, during a dialogue held at the district headquarters on Monday, said the teacher-pupil ratio, currently standing at 83:1, must be addressed to improve academic performance.

"Low pupil-teacher ratios are key to children's learning. In most schools visited in Kapchorwa, the ratio was 83:1," he said, compared with the national average of about 1:43.

Mr Cheptoe added that teacher absenteeism was also a major concern, adding that about 21 percent of teachers were absent during the survey period.

"When teachers are absent, children receive less instructional time, which negatively affects their learning," he said.

Why Kapchorwa pupils have low literacy levels



Children fetch water during a school day in Mutushet Sub-county in Bukwo District in March. PHOTO/FRED WAMBEDE

Mr Andrew Chebet, the headteacher of Bugimotwa Primary School, attributed low literacy levels to a combination of social and cultural factors, including child labour, poverty and prolonged cultural practices.

"If someone dies in the village, the body is kept for almost five days, and throughout that period children stay at home. This needs to change," he said.

He also cited limited parental involvement, adding that many learners live with grandparents who may place less emphasis on education.

"Some learners in villages stay with their grandparents, who are less concerned about the education of their grandchildren," he said.

83:1

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Ms Janet Nakhumicha, the deputy headmistress of Gamatui Girls Primary School, said parents had largely ignored the need to provide meals for children at school.

"Parents are negative about school feeding, yet you cannot expect a child to study on an empty stomach. Children are also kept at home to do garden work, especially during the seasons for coffee harvest and the uprooting of Irish potatoes," she said.

Mr John Yeko, a retired headteacher and opinion leader, called on the govern-

ment to reconsider restrictions on parental involvement in school feeding.

"If parents are not allowed to provide meals, then the government should do so on their behalf. The district also needs an Ordinance to curb child labour," he said.

Mr Yeko added that weak political will to enact such ordinances partly explains why Kapchorwa and other districts in the Sebei sub-region consistently perform poorly in the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE).

Intervention

The Kapchorwa District Education Officer, Mr Owen Kweko, said the district had begun implementing measures to improve learning outcomes.

"The findings will inform policy formulation, but most importantly, we have recruited more teachers to address staffing gaps in schools," he said.

Mr Kweko said the absence of school feeding remains a challenge, adding that the district is constrained by legal provisions against extra charges in government schools.

"Lack of feeding is a major cause of poor performance. We need an Ordinance on school feeding," he said, adding that learner absenteeism is also common in the first weeks of the term.

Mr Andrew Chepsikor, the assistant chief administrative officer for Kapchorwa District, said there is a need for a functional cultural institution to regulate burial practices.

"The issue of funerals is affecting school performance and must be regulated. The government is addressing other challenges, such as teacher shortages and inadequate infrastructure, to improve the quality of education," he said.