

How skills training is reviving education in oil region

BY KARIM MUYOBO

KAMPALA. For many families across Uganda's Albertine region, covering Nwoya, Hoima, Kikuube, Pakwach, Masindi and Buliisa, the dream of providing a quality education for their children often feels unattainable.

Parents face painful choices, while many bright children see their ambitions ended. The challenge is pronounced in the Bunyoro Sub-region.

According to a report by the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom, illiteracy stands at 47 percent, with women disproportionately affected. Learning outcomes remain worrying: in Buliisa, only 29.4 percent of learners from Primary Three to Primary Seven can read and comprehend a Primary Two-level English story, compared with the national average of 39.5 percent. In Nwoya District, just 48 percent of pupils complete Primary Seven, below the national completion rate of 52.67 per cent.

Yet the figures tell only part of the story. Behind them are determined children whose resilience persists despite hardship. For some, timely support has changed the course of their lives, offering a glimpse of how education in the oil region is gradually being rebuilt.

One such story is that of Lilian Lanyero. Raised in a subsistence farming family, her days were divided between schoolwork and helping her parents in the garden. Each morning, she walked nearly four kilometres to school. Despite the strain, she clung to a single ambition: becoming a medical doctor.



Some of the Tilenga Academy trainees pose for a photo during a ceremony in Kampala City in 2023. PHOTO/FILE

Her determination seems to be paying off after she scored Aggregate 10 in the Primary Leaving Examinations, placing her among the top performers in her district. That success opened a door her family had never imagined, the TotalEnergies Local Scholarship Scheme, which earned her a place at Ocer Campanion Jesuit College in Gulu City.

"I will be the first person in my family to study in a boarding school. I want to be the first doctor from my family, helping children and the elderly," she says proudly.

For Lilian, the scholarship represented more than financial support; it affirmed that her dreams were valid and achievable.

A similar turning point came for Frankline Oyirwoth. He obtained Aggregate 20 at O-Level, but progressing to A-Level seemed beyond reach. His mother, a single parent, could not afford the costs. With uncertainty clouding his future, hope

returned when he was selected for the TotalEnergies Local Scholarship Scheme.

The award covered tuition, learning materials and essential requirements, lifting the constant burden of financial worry. At Seeta High School in Mukono, Oyirwoth was able to focus on his studies, excelling with 16 points at A-Level. The result secured him a place at Makerere University, where he pur-

sued Petroleum Geoscience and Production.

Beyond academics, the programme offered mentorship, leadership training and career guidance.

"TotalEnergies took care of us like a family. The only thing my mother had to worry about was transport money," he recalls. Even after the scholarship period ended, mentorship continued through an alumni network supported by the company.

After graduating, Oyirwoth was employed by Zhongman Petroleum and Natural Gas Group, a drilling contractor on the Tilenga Project. Today, he works in the industry he once aspired to join.

These individual journeys are unfolding alongside the development of the Tilenga Project, operated by TotalEnergies EP Uganda. The project is expected to produce up to 190,000 barrels of oil per day.

Through its corporate social responsibility approach, TotalEnergies seeks to mitigate social risks while expanding opportunities for host communities.

"Skilling, knowledge transfer and maximising opportunities for Ugandans are vital commitments for us," says Ms Joy Muballe, the company's Social Performance and Biodiversity Director.

Since 2013, the Local Scholarship Scheme has supported 377 students from the Albertine region, targeting academically gifted learners from low-income households, with a strong emphasis on science subjects. Special attention is given to girls from Buliisa and Nwoya.

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BENEFICIARIES
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