

# School heads warned against charging illegal fees

By Rhyman Agaba

Primary and secondary school heads have been warned to stop charging illegal fees in government-aided institutions or face the full wrath of the law.

The warning was sounded by the head of the education desk at State House, Jimmy Nambiro, during an interview with *Mwalimu* last week. He warned that the illegal school charges imposed on learners under Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) programmes are pushing thousands of children out of school and into a cycle of poverty, crime and hopelessness.

Nambiro said investigations by his office have exposed widespread abuse in government-aided schools, where head teachers and administrators continue to levy charges despite full government financing of the programmes.

"I will do *barazas*, even in schools. What I have discovered is that even some students do not know that the education is free. They are chased away every day for money, so they start doubting the system and losing hope," Nambiro said.

He said such illegal charges defeat the very purpose of flagship government programmes like USE, UPE and the Parish Development

Model (PDM), which were designed to lift households out of poverty through direct financial support.

"You give a family PDM money, only for them to spend it on illegal school fees," he said.

He warned that the ripple effects of school dropouts go far beyond education, noting that many learners forced out of school migrate to urban centres and end up in informal settlements and ghettos.

"When there is no education and no skills, crime becomes attractive. The future becomes dark for them."

Nambiro explained that it was this harsh reality that informed President Yoweri Museveni's decision to roll

out the Presidential Skilling Initiative.

"The President realised that many children had been pushed out of formal education because of illegal charges and poverty," Nambiro said.

"He said, let me give them practical skills so they can survive and thrive."

The skilling programme, which started in Kampala before expanding to 20 regional hubs across the country, offers free vocational training to young people aged 16 years and above, regardless of their academic background.

"In Kampala alone, over 70,000 young people have been trained," Nambiro said. "They learn skills such as carpentry, plumbing,

shoemaking, bakery, tailoring, hairdressing and mechanics."

However, Nambiro expressed concern over reports that some Local Council I (LCI) chairpersons are demanding bribes to issue recommendation letters required for admission into skilling centres.

"I want to appeal to LCI chairpersons across the country. Do not charge money for a stamp. That small amount can lock out a child who would have become an engineer or entrepreneur."

## FREE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Last week, the First Lady and Minister for Education and Sports, Janet Museveni, announced that the



Jimmy Nambiro

Government was committed to rolling out free Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) education.

She made the announcement while commissioning the Uganda Vocational and Technical Assessment Board (UVTAB) Assessment Centre and headquarters in Kyambogo, Kampala City last Friday.