

As most education indicators are showing a negative trend. Declining enrolment rates in primary schools have pushed the country from attaining the global commitment of equitable access to basic education for all. Quoting statistics from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the report says as of last year, more than four million children were not in primary schools. "The situation is even more complicated since less than 50 per cent of those who enrol ever complete the primary school cycle," says the report. The report warns that low enrolment rates in secondary and post-secondary institutions could adversely affect the achievement of the national goal of becoming an industrialised nation by 2020. In addition to a poor education system, the agencies attributed low enrolment rates to high poverty levels, high cost of education, lack of facilities in both primary and secondary schools and negative socio-cultural aspects that hinder enrolment of girls. So far completion rates in primary school stand at 44 per cent. However, this fig-

Central Province registered the least disparities, although the situation was poor in the slums.

The report noted that with an absolute poverty level of spending one dollar per day standing at 43 per cent and with no hope of immediate recovery, more children of the poor will miss school. As of last year the enrolment rate in basic education was below the 76 per cent mark.

Basically education has suffered at all levels. Commenting on participation rates in early childhood education, the UN agencies report says enrolment rates are still too low despite the government projections of raising them to 50 per cent. "Gross enrolment in pre-primary schools has over the years been low and only rose marginally from 34.7 per cent in 1989 to 35.7 per cent in 1996," says the report.

Enrolment trends for secondary schools show a similar declining trend with rates falling from 31 per cent in 1989 to 26.5 per cent in 1996. And whereas the completion rates are relatively better compared to primary schools, they also fluctuate from year to year. Estimates



EXAMINED: A Standard Eight pupil at the Star of the Sea Primary School, Mombasa, goes through KCPE exam papers on Tuesday. One of the main criticisms against the 8-4-4 is that there are too many examinable subjects.

indicate that drop-out rates in secondary schools usually oscillate between 4.5 and 3.5 per cent.

Specifically commenting on the 8-4-4 system of education, the report says the current poor performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exams is directly related to the wide curriculum and paucity of facilities in schools. "Although the primary objective of the 8-4-4 system was to shift focus from training for white-collar jobs to more practical training geared to self-employment, this has totally failed," says the report.

The report noted the dismal performance in almost all subjects in KCPE. However, the poorest performance between 1991-94 occurred in Mathematics, Science and

Agriculture. Since 1990, scores in these subjects remained below 50 per cent although there was slight recovery in 1995. English Language is another subject that has continued to be performed relatively poorly in KCPE, says the report.

The system is riddled with high wastage levels in primary schools, occasioned by repetition that stands at 15.4 per cent each year. Ranking of schools and parents' wishes to have their children qualify for better secondary schools have heightened wastage through repetition in upper primary classes, a main negative feature of the 8-4-4 system.

On higher education, the report fell short of asking the government to re-introduce the 7-4-2, the system that was

replaced with 8-4-4 in 1987. "Another aspect of the current system is that Kenyan secondary graduates do not qualify for entry into universities in other countries, for which a year of pre-university studies has to be added," says the report.

And whereas the objective of 8-4-4 was to encourage technical and vocational education and training, enrolment in polytechnics and other technical institutions has decreased. "Between 1992-96, enrolment in 200 such colleges offering two-to-three year vocational training has on average remained at 32,000 students each year," says the report.

Of major concern are the gender disparities in univer-

sity education. Enrolment of women students in the five public universities still remains under 30 per cent.

The majority of women are in faculties of Arts and on average eight per cent are registered in engineering programmes.

The high cost of educational poverty have pushed the children of the poor to the periphery of access to formal education. "Non-formal education provided in adult education programmes and in informal schools is all that is left for the poor," says the report.

Most informal schools, especially those in the slum are overcrowded and lack learning facilities. They lack qualified teachers and are not recognised for entry to secondary schools.

Makerere strives for quality despite adversity

IMAGINE yourself as the vice-chancellor of one of the most distinguished universities in Africa. Your institution has survived many government changes and civil wars. Now financial support from the government is being reduced. To make matters worse, your country needs trained manpower and the demand for university places is rising dramatically. What do you do?

This was the situation facing Makerere University in Uganda not so long ago. Faced with the challenge of expanding enrolment without sacrificing academic standards, Makerere and the government had to re-think the entire system of university education. The success of their response can be seen in the fact that over the past five years Makerere has

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facilities more efficiently.

Along with other universities in the country, Makerere now has two course modules, one taught during the day for students on scholarships and the other in the evenings for self-sponsored students. This has been made possible by the lifting of government restrictions on the university places available to self-sponsored students.

This has not only enabled Makerere to accept more students, but also benefited the teaching staff. The fees paid by self-sponsored students are collected by the university and can be used to pay higher salaries - a particularly important development because government tertiary education budget cuts have seriously affected the sala-

Product (GDP) over the 1990s, the government has limited resources. Civil war and mismanagement had devastated the Ugandan economy by the time the current government led by President Yoweri Museveni took over in 1986. Per capita income had fallen by 43 per cent over 16 years and much of the infrastructure had been destroyed and needed to be rebuilt.

Although the GDP increased substantially in percentage terms after 1986, it was only US\$ 3.7 billion in 1994, of which less than 10 per cent was accounted for by the industrial sector. The next year the eastern part of the country was hit by drought while the western part experienced flooding because of heavy rains. Of the government revenue in 1996, 32.5 per cent came from grants.

Unable to provide adequate

of the demand for university places while it concentrated on the free provision of primary education. The World Bank calculated that the government spent 150 times more on each university student than it did on each primary school student. Thus, the emphasis on primary education would also stretch the available funds.

According to the Minister of State for Gender and Cultural Affairs, Jane Francis Kuka, the government also had another reason for the new educational focus. "Universal Primary Education will reduce illiteracy and the universities should sensitise the population to understand the objectives of the programme," she told a recent Kampala conference on inter-university co-operation. The government hopes that this will, in turn, help to reduce poverty.

bracket is 36.9 per cent. In contrast, in neighbouring Kenya the corresponding figures are 8. per cent and 13.9 per cent.

In the 25 years and over bracket, 37.2 per cent of men and 36.9 per cent of women in Uganda are illiterate. (Kenya also has higher figures in this bracket: 26 per cent and 54.2 per cent, respectively).

To compensate for the reduction in state funding of tertiary education, the government has allowed the establishment of private universities, with the result that there are now a total of nine universities in the country: Makerere (which attracts the lion's share of students), Islamic University, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Uganda Martyrs University, Nkumba University, Ndejje University