

United Nations Praises Country's UPE

New Vision (Kampala)
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By Arthur Baguma

THE United Nations (UN) has commended Uganda for the "dramatic increase" in primary school enrollment because of providing free education for all. According to the Millennium Development Goals report released by UN yesterday, Uganda is one of the countries that have made tremendous progress towards achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE).

"Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and many other countries have abolished fees for primary schools resulting in dramatic increases in enrollment in a few years," the report said.

The report indicated that Africa had registered progress towards UPE, with enrollment increasing from 57 % in 1999 to 70% in 2005.

The other Millennium Development Goals which UN wants all countries to achieve by 2015 are eradicating poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and reducing child mortality.

Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development are also among the goals.

The report noted that countries across Africa had demonstrated that rapid and large-scale progress towards the goals was possible when strong government leadership and good policies are combined with adequate financial and technical support from the international community.

"Many African governments, with growing donor support, are taking to national scale the lessons of the Millennium Villages - that local leadership and a combination of interventions can transform poor communities in a short time."

The report showed a significant progress towards halving extreme poverty.

The proportion of people living on one dollar a day or less worldwide has declined from 45.9 % to 41.1% since 1999, the report stated.

However, it warned that reaching the poverty target required that the current pace is nearly doubled.

The report showed that there had been little progress in fighting hunger and malnutrition among children.

The proportion of underweight children below five years declined by a meagre 4% between 1990 and 2005, from 33% to 29%, according to the report.

It said more women are taking up leadership positions in Africa.

The share of parliamentary seats held by women has increased substantially, from 7% in 1990 to 17% this year, but the share of women who earn a salary, aside from farming, still stands at less than one-third, the UN said.

Fuelled by improved economic policies and rising commodity prices, annual economic growth for African countries averaged at about 6% for the last three years, this according to the report, has spread growth evenly among countries.

The International Monetary Fund foresees a short-term trend rate moving toward 7% per year, the UN noted.

African countries continue to depend on few primary commodities for export and lack the essential public investment in agriculture, health, education and infrastructure, UN observed.

These are needed to strengthen capacity for production and trade, sustain high growth rates and create employment, it said.