

# 2,000 to miss student loans

By Mary Karugaba

A total of 2,000 students who had hoped to join university through the students' loan scheme may have to look elsewhere as the Government says it has no money to finance their education.

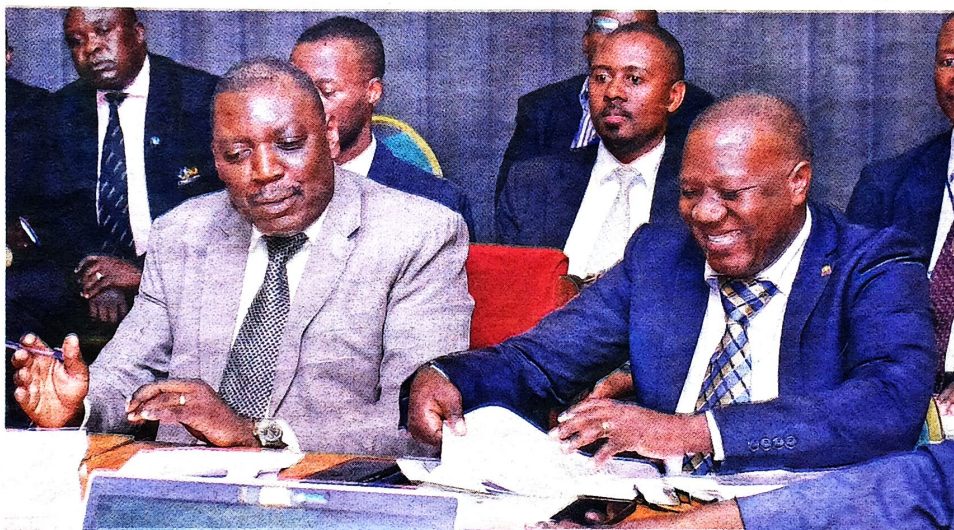
Officials from the Higher Education Students Financing Board last week told MPs on Parliament's education committee that the funds available this year could only support 1,000 new students.

The board's executive director, Michael Wanyama, informed the committee that of the budget of sh35.2b required to finance 3,000 new students, the finance ministry could only provide sh27b, creating a shortfall of sh7.5b.

"Without these additional resources, the board will only be able to take up 1,000 students," Wanyama said.

The team was yesterday appearing before the committee chaired by Jacob Opolot (Pallisa County) to present the sector budget estimates for the 2019/20 financial year.

Wanyama complained that although the number of applicants was estimated to grow to 7,000 in the next academic year, the board continues to receive funding for the same number of



Wanyama, Bbosa Kizito, the loans and scholarships manager and other officials appear before the education committee of Parliament last week. Photo by Miriam Namutebi

students, which leaves many needy students unable to continue with studies.

He proposed that in order to address issues of lack of funding, the Government should give the board vote status to enable it plan and properly manage its resources. Wanyama also expressed

concern over the lack of resources allocated to continuing students who normally drop out. This is in addition to the board's failure to fund meals and accommodation, industrial training, appliances and other equipment for the beneficiaries.

"There is increasing outcry on the part of students benefiting from the loan scheme and university administrators on the need to fund these critical areas. It is evident that the students struggle to raise funds to support themselves and some of them end up forfeiting the opportunity," he

said.

Wanyama proposed that in future, the Government should consider funding the entire package for the selected beneficiaries.

In 2014, the Government introduced the loan scheme to enable science students from poor backgrounds to



access higher education using money borrowed from the Government.

The students are expected to repay the loans upon completion of studies after a grace period of one year.

The MPs, however, complained of inadequate loan recovery measures.

MP Nathan Itungo (Kashari South) said if the board had instituted tight recovery measures, it would not be having financing challenges.

"The board is always talking of financing, but not about the money that is being recovered. Why don't you use that money to finance other students?" Itungo asked.

Wanyama explained that although the board had instituted stringent measures and a recovery department, the recovery period for the first batch had just started.

However, he said so far, sh78m had been collected from the beneficiaries.