

By Egessa Hajusu

Wall fences have been constructed at St Joseph Mawero and Mawero Islamic Primary schools in Busia district. The fences, constructed at a cost of sh450m, are expected to improve child safety and create a more conducive learning environment.

The two schools have for years grappled with hit-and-run accidents that left several children injured and some hit by cyclists who frequently cut through school compounds while transporting smuggled goods.

The situation was worsened by cattle grazing within the school premises, with animals often charging at pupils during lessons.

These incidents strained relations between parents and school authorities, as some parents demanded that schools meet the medical costs for injured children, costs the schools said they could not afford.

In several cases, parents withdrew their children and transferred them to schools they believed were safer.

The newly installed wall fences are expected to protect children, secure school property, safeguard the environment and provide a safe teaching and learning space for both teachers

and pupils. Beyond the school compounds, the fences will also shield learners from road crashes along the Busia-Tororo (24km) road, which is currently under construction. Both schools are located along this busy route.

During a function to hand over the completed fences at St Joseph Mawero Primary School, the Busia district kadhi, Sheikh Jamilu Juma Obanjo, speaking on behalf of Mawero Islamic Primary School, said he was particularly pleased that the fence had secured parts of the school land that some unscrupulous individuals were attempting to grab.

He commended the Government for creating an enabling environment that has attracted investors, saying some have begun positively impacting communities where they operate.

Obanjo



A section of the sh300m fence at St Joseph Mawero Primary School in Busia district

said his office was ready to work with the education department to address parents' concerns over poor performance, but urged parents to play their role by supporting their children to stay in school and complete their education.

"Teachers should make sure that children are kept within the school gate and released when going home," Obanjo said.

The headteacher of St Joseph Mawero Primary School, Catherine Adong, said the learners would now have a safer place to learn, grow and dream.

Godfrey Osenda, the chairperson of the school management committee,

said some of the people who had been breaking into schools to steal textbooks, signposts, lightning arresters and flour were parents and pupils themselves.

Residents Hilary Wokero and Julius Onyango said now the schools are secure from intruders, foundation bodies should work with the Government to add more infrastructure, including

boarding sections.

Caroline Wambani, a parent, welcomed the fencing but asked Wagagai to renovate old classrooms, construct new ones and provide desks to reduce congestion.

Friday Amos Okitui, the chairperson of Amogoro village, appealed to residents to take responsibility for protecting the stainless-steel fences from scrap dealers. Okitui commended the gold miner for responding to issues such as safe water, school fencing and support to vulnerable families, saying three out of 15 community requests made since production began in August had been fulfilled.

He challenged school administrators to improve academic performance to match the schools' new look and urged

residents not to be jealous as Wagagai extends corporate social responsibility to other parishes in Buteba sub-county.

District education officer Anthony Wanyama cautioned school management committees against blaming headteachers alone for poor performance, stressing that it is a collective responsibility.

He said despite having 14 teachers, as opposed to many schools with 10, St Joseph Mawero's performance had remained poor.

Resident district commissioner Hajira Namagogwe said the NRM Government had enabled the developments and urged residents to safeguard the gains, especially during the holiday period, by disciplining and caring for children.

Adam Wang, the deputy site manager, said Wagagai only started production in August and is committed to growing with the community and improving socio-economic conditions.

Regional co-operation state minister John Mulimba, the chief guest, welcomed the improved relations between Wagagai and the community. He said arrangements were underway for the company to construct Alupe Primary School, which was destroyed by mining activities.

**Sh450m**

**The total cost of constructing wall fences at St Joseph Mawero and Mawero Islamic Primary Schools.**