

PARENTS WARNED AGAINST OUTSOURCING THEIR ROLE TO PHONES AND SCHOOLS

BY DALLEN NAMUGGA

As children filled the halls of St Francis Day and Boarding Primary School in Ntinda, Kampala last weekend, it was clear this was not an ordinary gathering. For three days, parents, caregivers, educators and teenagers sat through candid conversations about discipline, digital exposure, broken families, faith, money, and the emotional weight children carry.

By the time the Empowered Teen Convention closed on December 13, more than 120 participants had been challenged to rethink what parenting in the 21st century truly demands. Held under the theme, *Nurturing the Future Generation in the 21st Century*, the convention was less about perfect parenting and more about honest self-examination.

SHAPING A CHILD'S MIND

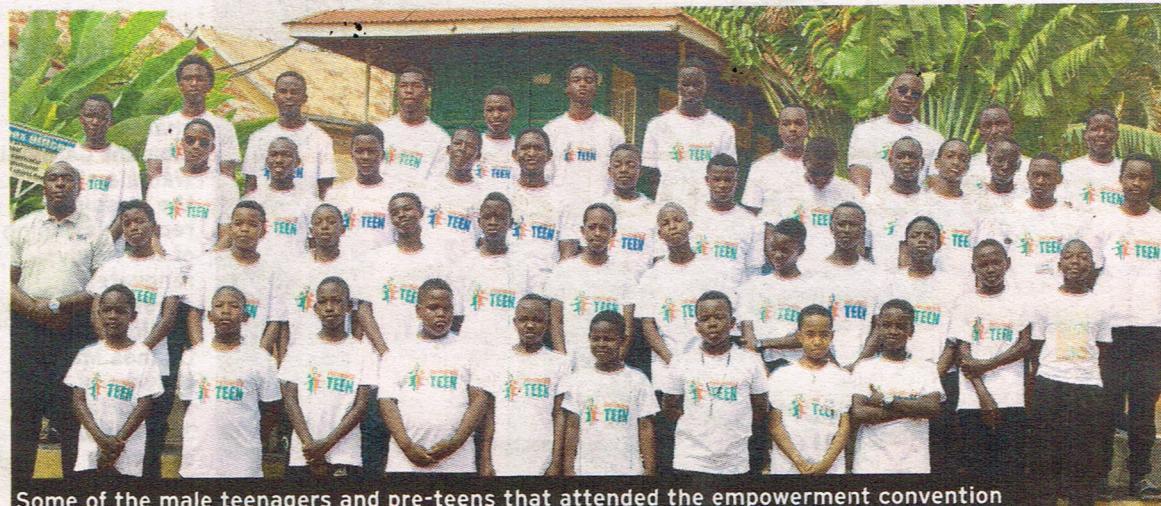
Opening the conversation was counsellor and psychologist Ketsa Kizito, the founder of the Empowered Teen Convention, who framed parenting as a mental health responsibility long before it becomes a disciplinary one. She pointed to neighbourhoods, homes and caregivers as the silent architects of a child's emotional well-being.

Children, she noted, do not grow in isolation. Their mental health is influenced by the spaces they live in and the habits they observe daily. Homes where substance abuse, neglect or emotional absence exist often produce children who struggle internally, even when they appear "well-behaved" on the surface.

One of her strongest warnings was directed at the modern illusion of safety. Parents often feel reassured when children stay indoors, quiet and glued to their phones. Kizito cautioned that isolation behind bedroom doors does not equal to protection. With unrestricted Internet access, children are exposed to adult content, harmful language and sexualised spaces far earlier than many parents realise.

Her call was practical: Limit screen time, hold family meetings, stay curious about children's online lives and prioritise psychosocial support and self-care as parents.

Teenagers, she reminded the



Some of the male teenagers and pre-teens that attended the empowerment convention



Mutekanga



Kizito



Bagenda

audience, are naturally loud, fearless and emotionally intense.

Rather than trying to crush that energy, parents must learn to guide it with patience and love.

DISCIPLINE WITHOUT FEAR

A panel discussion brought lived experiences into the room, starting with actor and media personality, Sam Bagenda, popularly known as Dr Bbosa. His parenting journey, shaped by fame, absence and eventual responsibility, resonated deeply with many parents.

Bagenda spoke openly about how his career once kept him away from home, eventually leading to a broken marriage and the sudden reality of raising children largely on his own. Instead of retreating, he adjusted his entire lifestyle to accommodate his children, often moving with them during work tours and turning everyday moments into bonding experiences.

Rather than asserting authority through fear, he chose companionship. He described becoming not just a father, but a brother, caregiver and guide.

Household chores were shared, conversations were constant and discipline came through reasoning rather than punishment.

CHILDREN DO NOT GROW IN ISOLATION. THEIR MENTAL HEALTH IS INFLUENCED BY THE SPACES THEY LIVE IN AND THE HABITS THEY OBSERVE DAILY.

Faith also played a central role in his parenting. He encouraged families to pray together and remain spiritually grounded, not as a performance, but as a source of shared values. Fathers, in particular, were challenged to become more present, both physically and emotionally.

THE POWER OF ATTENTION

Psychologist Rebecca Kizeli Mayengo offered a reflective perspective, drawing from both her professional background and personal parenting experience. She credited her own upbringing for shaping how she raised her

children, especially the power of encouragement during moments of self-doubt.

Children are among the most dependent beings in nature and require consistent guidance well into adulthood," she said. Attention, she said, is not indulgence, it is necessary for a child's development.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Digital media specialist Anita Aditare tackled one of the most uncomfortable truths of modern parenting: The fear of being disliked. She argued that many parents avoid correcting their children because they want to be seen as friends rather than authority figures.

"Growing up without firm boundaries often leads to adults who struggle with accountability. When children are never told 'no,' they learn to blame others for their mistakes," she said.

Aditare warned that excessive busyness is another form of neglect. When parents are emotionally unavailable, children turn elsewhere for validation and guidance, often to peers or online spaces that do not have their best interests at heart. Her call was for

PARENTS' TAKE

For single father Robert Kibuuwa, the battle with children is on digital devices. He shared how he deliberately limits phone access at home, even refusing to give his Primary Seven daughter a smartphone. He described parenting as "tough love", cautioning against buying children everything they want. Overindulgence, he said, robs them of lessons about effort and delayed gratification.

The convention, he added, opened his eyes to the value of involving children in family discussions, something he plans to implement moving forward.

Parent Saul Abok offered a brief, but significant observation: "Religion still plays a critical role in shaping children's values." Beyond rituals, he argued, faith institutions provide moral grounding, community accountability and a sense of purpose that many families struggle to instil alone.

In a society grappling with broken families, digital overload and moral confusion, he believes religious spaces remain an underutilised support system in child upbringing.

balance: "Parents must be firm yet approachable, corrective yet safe. Children should feel secure enough to bring their mistakes home, not hide them out of fear or shame."

WHAT MINISTRY SAYS

The Assistant Commissioner for Private Schools at the education ministry, George Mutekanga, lauded the convention as a timely community-driven response to national parenting challenges. He acknowledged that while schools carry much of the burden, parenting remains the foundation of a child's values.

Parents, he observed, often shift blame between children, teachers and institutions, forgetting their central role. He noted that while children spend much of the year in school, values, discipline and character are first taught at home.

"Adolescence is a volatile stage where guidance can either redirect a child positively or leave them vulnerable. Empowering young people is a national investment," he said.