



At Busoga College Mwiri, the alumni built a new gate last year. Such efforts are slowly reviving the academic glory of traditional schools

## Waking up sleeping giants

Most of Uganda's traditional secondary schools, once symbols of academic excellence, pride of communities and training grounds of national leaders have been struggling. However, they are finding their footing again, courtesy of their former students, writes **RICHARD ATEGEKA**

**A**cross the country, alumni associations are sacrificing time, money and expertise to revive schools that shaped their lives.

The old boys and girls are doing renovations, mentoring students and instilling in them discipline, providing bursaries and scholastic materials to needy students. Every weekend, football turfs around Kampala are always teeming with alumni football leagues to raise funds for schools.

For example, at Nyakasura School in Fort Portal city, signs of such efforts are visible. The access road to the school has been tarmacked and dormitories are freshly painted, among others. The Rev. Richardson Balinda, the headteacher, credits the alumni for these achievements.

"They have revamped infrastructure,

# Alumni leading efforts to rebuild traditional schools

including buildings and dormitories," he says.

"They are also working to ensure that our 100th anniversary celebrations this year are a success."

Balinda adds that the old students are not just fundraisers, but partners.

"They help us in improving leadership and management. They even enroll their children in the school," he says.

At King's College Budo in Wakiso district, John Kazibwe, the school headteacher, says the support offered by alumni is unique because they seem to understand the needs of the school.

"They lived here and can identify the areas where support is needed most," he says.

Kazibwe says that alumni contributions are usually based on their experiences as students.

"Support depends on how one was influenced by the school. Positive influence attracts positive support. Schools should give the best experience to learners so give back to the institution when they succeed," he says.

### NTARE SCHOOL

At Ntare School in Mbarara district, Bruce Mugela, the school alumni affairs officer,

credits the old students for many infrastructure projects.

"They built the main hall where students gather for assembly. The library was constructed by two prominent old boys, Presidents Yoweri Museveni and Paul Kagame. They have renovated science laboratories and dormitories," Mugela says.

The old students also set up a school bakery, donated computers, and organised medical camps for the communities around the school."

Mugela notes that the alumni spirit is deeply embedded in the school culture.

"We are proud that old boys continue to identify gaps and step in. It is part of our identity," he says.

Mugela says, despite the effort, Ntare faces challenges.

"Our population is now 2,500, but we have only 130 computers. These

serve both students and teachers, plus the wider community during ICT trainings. We need more computers and better Internet connectivity."

The alumni's progressive efforts have given us a robotics club, a first of its kind in the region.

"We showcased our projects at the National Education and Career Expo," Mugela says.

Apollo Kashanku, the chairperson of the Ntare School Old Boys' Association, believes that beyond infrastructure, mentorship is their greatest legacy.

"Once in a while, the school hosts old boys to talk to students about career. For instance, medical students visit the school annually to inspire young learners," he says.

Kashanku says many students have confessed benefiting from the alumni career talk.

The old boys are also expanding the library to match the growing student population.

"The current library is now small, so we have launched a fundraising drive to expand it," he says.

### ST LEO'S COLLEGE KYEGOBE

St Leo's College Kyegobe in Fort Portal had academically declined to 190 students due to mismanagement. However, Trophy Atuhairwe, the

**SKILLING**  
Graduate rallies girls to study sciences

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**PARENTING**  
BECOME BETTER, NOT BUSIER  
IN 2026

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school headteacher, says the alumni have since revived the school.

"They pay over sh30m per term for vulnerable students," he says.

"They have renovated all dormitories, spent more than sh40m, installed pavers worth sh100m and provided solar-powered lights valued at sh40m."

The alumni also support remedial teaching and are planning to construct a perimeter wall with a sh800m modern gate.

"We also need a memorial building or a new administration block, but the perimeter wall is the most urgent," Atuhairwe explains.

With 691 students, the school now stands renewed, but the revival did not come easy.

Eng. Emmek Turyatunga, the chairperson of the St Leo's College Kyegobe Old Boys Association, remembers when the school was on the brink of closure.

"By 2015, the school had declined from over 1,000 students to just 190

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# HOW OLD STUDENTS ARE REBUILDING SCHOOLS

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because of exam malpractice, strikes and poor management.

"We decided to act. Since then, old boys have injected over shs1b in renovations, sports, water projects, bursaries and staff facilitation."

Today, the school enrolment has increased to over 600 students.

Turyatunga adds that their efforts have paid off. The school's Scouts Club excelled in national competitions and will represent the country in Dar es Salaam.

He adds that their focus is on impact, not publicity.

"Old Boys from schools that never declined often focus on visibility, but for us, it's about revival."

## GROWING PAINS

In Kumi district, Ngara High School faces challenges of space and technology.

Andrew Ochan, the director of studies, says the school population is expanding faster than its facilities.

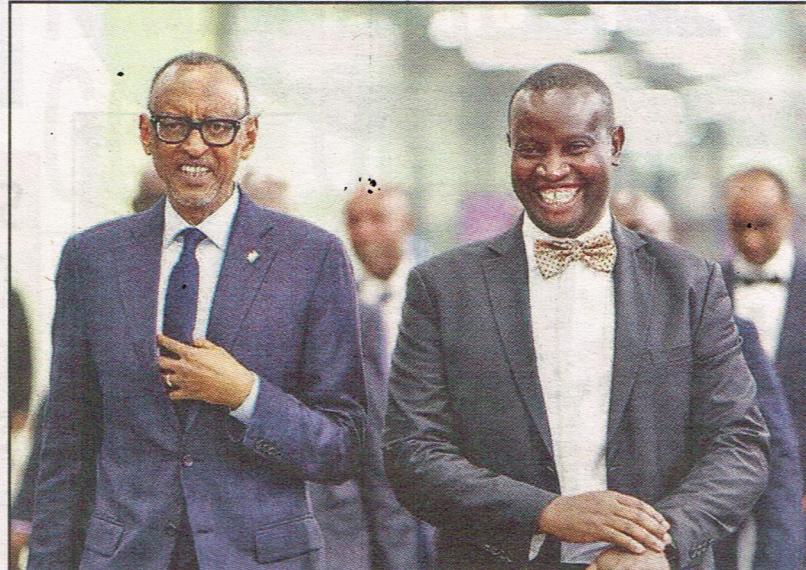
"Accommodation is our biggest challenges. Classrooms are becoming smaller. So, we are prioritising infrastructure to accommodate the growing numbers."

Alumni support has already made a difference.

"They provided computers for O'level students, which has helped us to teach the new curriculum," Ochan explains.

"But the demand for ICT is high because every lesson has technology integrated. We need more ICT labs and better accommodation," he adds.

At Kabalega Secondary



**Ntare School**  
alumni association chairperson Apollo Kashanku, welcomes President Paul Kagame to their dinner. Presidents Museveni and Kagame have greatly contributed to the school's development

School in Masindi district, Jackson Katusiime, the headteacher says alumni involvement bridges the gap between government support and school needs.

"Alumni should follow up on how current students are studying, staffing, learning materials and infrastructure. We can't wait for government to do everything," he says.

The school's alumni have already made a visible difference.

"They renovated our library, bought a water pump to end our water shortage and are now constructing a new school gate," Katusiime says proudly. "We'll soon have one of the best gates in the region."

The old students also pay school fees for bright, but needy learners.

"Some of our students are academically strong, but lack

means. The alumni step in to keep them in school," he says.

## KYAMBOGO COLLEGE

In Kampala, Kyambogo College School has also benefitted from alumni engagement.

Stanley Mugume, the headteacher, says the alumni have been "very intentional" about science education and mentorship.

"They support our science focus, inspire students through career guidance and fund projects like the renovation of our library," he says.

"After we tarmacked the access road, one old boy donated street lights."

Mugume says the alumni also train students in debates, poetry, leadership and recently, Kyambogo students took part in United Nations activities marking 80 years.

Still, Mugume admits

infrastructure remains a major challenge.

"Our buildings are old. We thank the education ministry and Kampala Capital City Authority for helping us get rid of asbestos roofs. Now we want our alumni to help us build a new ICT complex," he says.

## MANAFWA

In Manafwa district, Bubulo Girls High School alumni are rebuilding the school after near collapse.

Jannipher Mamai, the treasurer of the interim alumni committee, paints a picture of a school in distress.

"Our school had deteriorated, the buildings, the academics, even discipline. We began by renovating dormitories and classrooms, extended piped water and we are now constructing a new gate."

With enrolment having

## CAUTION

Patrick Kaboyo, National Secretary of the Federation of Non-State Education Institutions appreciates alumni efforts, but says they must balance visibility with sustainability.

"Many alumni fail to balance their time and commitment. Their service is voluntary and driven by motivation. They must attach it to what drives them to return."

Kaboyo also cautions against focusing solely on buildings.

"Schools should balance visible projects like infrastructure with invisible priorities, such as mentorship and innovation," he says.

"Invite alumni professionals to inspire learners and attach students to alumni enterprises to gain skills."

He urges alumni to show the true picture and stop exaggerating when marketing their schools.

"Once an alumnus, you are one for life. Sustainability should be the goal. It's painful to visit a school you loved and find it gone."

fallen to just 200 students, the alumni began community outreach to recruit more girls.

"We even go to villages to

encourage parents to bring their daughters here," she says. "We have asked the Government to post there experienced teachers."

Their advocacy helped restore the board of governors after years without one, but challenges remain.

"The leadership doesn't give time to the school. There's poor co-ordination and indiscipline. During Uganda National Examinations Board final exams, girls walked out after the first paper and returned after four days. Bubulo was once a big school, but now villagers even graze animals in the compound. We are determined to restore its dignity," Mamai laments.

## SECTOR LESSON

David Atuhuura, the director of Buhaguzi Model High School in Kikuube district, says traditional schools should see themselves as business entities, not just not-for-profit institutions.

"In the past, traditional schools performed well because there was no competition. Now parents have the option of private schools."

Atuhuura stresses that traditional schools must care about customer satisfaction to remain relevant.

"Private schools have feeding programmes for teachers and students and parents willingly support them," he says.

However, he credits alumni for holding traditional schools to account.

"They keep headteachers in check and ensure results improve," he adds.