



Community spaces also serve as informal villages where families can meet. PHOTO/PROMISE TWINAMUKYE.

# How modern parents are creating their own villages

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BY GLORIA IRANKUNDA

For many parents, family gatherings, advice from grandparents, and the support of uncles and aunts are staples of raising a child. But what happens when that village is not around? Increasingly, Ugandan parents are navigating parenthood with little or no extended family to lean on. The challenge is real, but so is the creativity and resilience these parents bring to the task.

## Building support network

Without grandparents to babysit or cousins to play with, parents must actively create a network of support. Some

find it through friends, colleagues, or neighbours, forming informal parenting circles where responsibilities are shared.

Janet Namutebi, a marketing executive and mother of two in Kampala, explains: "I realised I could not do everything alone. I reached out to a few close friends with children around the same age. We rotate playdates and help each other with small tasks. It is like having a family without the family tree."

For parents living in neighbourhoods where most people are busy with work or have their own family commitments, building this support network requires persistence.

"At first, I felt awkward asking for help," says Sarah Akello, a single mother raising a six-year-old in Ntinda. "But then I realised that other parents are facing the same struggles. Once you break the ice, friendships form, and suddenly you have a community that is ready to step in."

Community spaces also serve as informal villages. Churches and sports clubs are not just for activities, they become spaces for advice, mentorship, and friendship.

Patrick Mugisha, a father of three in Kira Municipality, shares his experience: "I met other fathers at the church soccer practice. We exchange ideas, support each other when things get tough, and sometimes just vent. It feels like I am part of a bigger family."

For many, these spaces fill the gap left by absent relatives, creating an environment where children can socialise safely and parents can share practical advice.

## Learning on the job

Without the guiding hand of older relatives, parents often turn to research, online forums, and books. Paediatric advice, nutritional tips, and educational strategies become self-taught skills. While overwhelming at first, it fosters a unique confidence.

"There is no handbook for being a mother without family around," says

## TAKEAWAY

Parenting without an extended family is not without its challenges, but it is entirely possible with creativity, resourcefulness, and intentional community-building. Children thrive when surrounded by caring, consistent adults, whether related by blood or chosen along the way. Parents who embrace this approach often find that they, too, learn patience, creativity, and the deep satisfaction of raising children who are confident, adaptable, and loved. The absence of extended family does not mean a lack of guidance, support, or love. For parents such as Namutebi, Akello and Mugisha, the journey has become an opportunity to define what family truly means; a collection of people who care, support, and grow together.

Akello. "I read, I ask questions, and sometimes I just try and fail. But my child is thriving, and I am learning every day."

In urban settings, parents often rely on WhatsApp parenting groups or Facebook communities to share advice on child health, schooling, and behavioural challenges. For many, these online communities offer instant support.

"I posted about my child's refusal to eat vegetables," Namutebi recalls. "I got more than 50 replies with ideas, recipes, and even personal stories. It reminded me that I am not alone in this."

Some parents even seek professional guidance more proactively. Pediatricians, child psychologists, and nutritionists become essential allies in raising a well-rounded child.

"When your parents or grandparents are not around, you become the primary source of guidance and support for your child," explains Lydia Nabbale, a child psychologist in Kampala. "It is important to compensate by creating a network of professionals, mentors, and friends who can guide both parent and child."

## Creative approaches at home

Technology also helps bridge the gap. Video calls with friends, family elsewhere, or mentorship programmes allow children to maintain social connections that are otherwise missing. WhatsApp groups and Zoom "playdates" have become surprisingly popular, offering a sense of community de-

spite physical distance.

Mugisha notes: "Even though my parents live upcountry, we schedule a weekly call. My children love it, they tell stories, play games, and it makes them feel connected to their grandparents even if they are not physically present."

Some parents also rely on creative partnerships with neighbours. Babysitting swaps, shared shopping trips, or joint school drop-offs help parents manage daily responsibilities.

"I could not imagine handling school, work, and household chores alone," Namutebi says. "Our neighbour agreed to pick up our children on days when we are late. In return, I help her with her younger child when she has meetings. It is mutual support, and it feels like family."

## Parenting without guilt

Perhaps the biggest challenge is emotional. Parents without extended families sometimes wrestle with guilt, feeling they are depriving their children of experiences or guidance.

Nabbale advises: "It is important to recognise that family is not only blood. Supportive, consistent adults, whether friends, mentors, or teachers, can provide the stability children need. The key is presence, not proximity."

Single parenthood, career demands, or relocation can amplify this sense of guilt. Many parents feel they are failing their children simply because they cannot replicate the traditional extended family structure. Yet, children thrive on consistent love, attention, and guidance, not necessarily on the number of relatives around.

For many parents, the experience fosters resilience and intentionality. Every bedtime story read, every shared meal, and every lesson becomes a conscious act of love.

"I may not have a grandmother's recipes or aunts to share stories," Namutebi says. "But I am creating traditions, and my children know they are loved. That counts more than anything."

## Non-traditional villages

Interestingly, parents without extended family often report stronger bonds with their children, according to Nabbale. With fewer adults involved in day-to-day decisions, children grow more aware of their parents' choices and routines, developing independence and empathy.

Akello notes: "My child often helps around the house and takes responsibility for small tasks. I think it is because they are more involved in family life and understand that we all contribute."

For some, raising a child without extended family also encourages self-reliance. Parents learn to trust their instincts, make informed decisions, and solve problems creatively.

Mugisha shares: "When my parents were not around to guide me, I had to figure things out on my own. Now, I pass that same lesson to my children, how to be resourceful and confident."

## Finding joy in the journey

Despite the challenges, many parents describe profound satisfaction in navigating parenthood without extended family. There is a sense of accomplishment in building a household that works, in shaping traditions, and in creating a loving environment entirely from one's own efforts.

"It is empowering," says Namutebi. "Every small victory, such as teaching my child to cook a simple meal, or helping them excel at school, is a milestone because I know I did it with my own hands and heart."



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