

MWALI MU

PHOTOS BY RITAH MUKASA

Old students take charge

Across Ugandā, old students of traditional schools are investing billions to rescue their alma mater from the brink of collapse. **RITAH MUKASA** traces how the alumni raise the funds.

Busoga College Mwiri needs no introduction when it comes to secondary schools that have bred influential leaders and professionals since its inception in 1911. It was a dream school for many.

So great that its motto; *Kulwa Katonda n'gwanga Lyaffe*, loosely meaning "For God and Our country" it is said, influenced the national motto "For God and My Country".

However, by the mid-2000s, the school had become a shadow of its former self. The dormitories and classrooms looked dilapidated. The enrolment also dropped sharply because of decline in academics.

And in 2013, as Mwiri was celebrating 100 years, there was a students' strike, yet the school was grappling with sh1b debt. If it wasn't for the old boys' intervention, this great school would be history. Rodney Henry Mugisha, the publicity secretary of Mwiri Old boys Association (MOBA), says the college is in a better place now.

"We took over leadership of the board of governors. Former prime minister Dr Ruhakana Rugunda is our Patron. We have over 16,000 alumni in 40 groups," he says.

They pool resources through social media groups, Mwiri Football League and fundraising events. MOBA combines both Mwiri Primary School and college old boys.

What's more, they also raise millions from the sale of memorabilia, alumni subscription and life membership. Each member pays sh50,000 annually and life membership is at sh1m.

Mugisha says, more money comes in from the Government and the alumni chapters across the world.

"Our sweat is paying off," he says. The school enrolment has risen from 500 to over 1,000 and all the debts have been cleared. They have also built a main gate, renovated the



Old students of Nabumali High School raised sh280m to renovate the institution's swimming pool. Of late, alumni of traditional schools have stepped up efforts to revive the glory of their alma mater

Alumni associations lead revival of traditional schools

sports facilities and staff quarters. Most of the asbestos roofs have been replaced. The dormitories, chapel, dining hall and classes have been given a face lift as well.

Next, MOBA is pooling resources to construct a modern swimming pool. "We are keen on accountability," Mugisha says. Money is deposited on the MOBA account and members are given accountability.

TORORO

In Tororo district, St Peter's College Tororo, established in 1941 has also been struggling for many years. Its performance and infrastructure deteriorated significantly, but the St Peter's College Tororo Old Boys Association (SPECTOBA) has embarked on a fundraising campaign, targeting sh3b to revive the school. Aside from the fundraising dinners, Andrew Onapito a communication specialist, says: "We also organise

sporting activities targeting older alumni from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s."

SPECTOBA has also established the Bernard Onyango Scholarship Fund in partnership with the family of the late Bernard Onyango, a former educationist.

NABUMALI SHINING AGAIN

From its inception in 1912 up to 1975, Nabumali High School was among the top secondary schools in the country. Sitting on 100 acres in Mbale district, the school had over 1,500 students, an Olympic size swimming pool, modern laboratories and sports facilities. It also produced hockey and basketball stars, Collins Wasswa Matovu, patron of the Nabumali Old students Association (NOSA), says.

In 1977, however, the school started to deteriorate. By 2017, the enrolment had dropped to 400 due

to poor management and academic decline.

In 1985, Matovu says NOSA was formed to revive the school, but with minimal impact. They kept pushing, until June 2017 when they pooled sh280m to rehabilitate the swimming pool, which had been closed for 41 years.

This milestone motivated more alumni to join and since then, they have completed 12 multi-billion infrastructure projects. They also run a four year bursary scheme for 12 needy students in O'level.

"We prioritise accountability. In 2020, we fired the headteacher, his deputy and bursar for mismanaging funds," Matovu says,

On how they raise the funds, he says, they have six houses; Aggrey, Apollo, Banks, Crabtree, Hannington and Tomusange, each with an average of 200 registered members. For most projects, members

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PARENTING HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH SCHOOL

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contribute.

What they raise from the annual dinner goes to the asbestos roofs replacement. But also, alumni do fundraising competitions coupled with sh6m contribution by each house to the bursary scheme.

More money comes in from subscriptions; an ordinary member pays sh100,000, life membership ordinary is at sh2.5m, gold is sh5m and platinum is at sh10m. The technical alumni offer pro bono services. After many years, the school regained its position as the best in the 2025 Uganda Certificate of Education examinations.

KABALEGA SS

In Masindi district, the Kabalega Secondary School Old Boys Association (KASSOBA) has invested millions in the restoration of the

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OLD STUDENTS BREATHE LIFE IN SCHOOLS

PHOTOS BY RITAH MUKASA

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school. Jackson Katusiime, the headteacher and old student, says they rely on alumni subscription and membership plus fundraising drives. The old boys raise money during their annual retreats and different engagements. The pledges are then pooled before the project commences.

"We also reach out to our families, friends and other old students for support," he says.

For sustainability, Katusiime says the school administration informs the alumni about all critical needs. They also have a representative on the board of governors.

Kabalega SS was established by the colonial administration in 1959 and in 1980, KASSOBA which currently has more than 700 active members, was formed. They have renovated and restocked the library with textbooks, set up the school band, built a dormitory, classroom block and gate. They have also bought a water pump, donated computers and Omukama Kabalega sculpture. Currently, a bursary scheme is up and running.

MARYHILL SCHOOL, NGANWA

At Maryhill High School in Mbarara city, the Maryhill Old Girls Association (MOGA) is running a Girl Child Fund.

The association provides school fees and essential requirements to needy students at the school. Catherine Nakyanzi, the MOGA deputy publicity secretary, says members pledge contributions on a termly basis. They also fundraise through cohorts.

A cohort can decide to cover school fees for a student or two. In addition, the old students also do community fundraising initiatives, such as sh10,000 drive runs over a two-week period. Add to



Old boys of Kabalega SS renovated classrooms, dormitories and erected the statue of Omukama Kabalega in the compound. Inset is the water tank erected by old boys of St Peter's College Tororo to improve water supply at the institution



Matovu (wearing blue suit) joins Nabumali High School alumni to cut cake during 2025 fundraising dinner

that purpose-driven activities, such as the recent *Dance for a Purpose* event.

Beyond that, MOGA has also been at the forefront of the construction of classroom and dormitory blocks.

Away from that, at Nganwa High School in Sheema district, Prof. Mesharch Katusiimeh, hails the old boys for 'resurrecting' this school. Katusiimeh, an old student and board chairperson for six years, says by 2017, the school had almost collapsed.

"We created social media platforms and mobilised over 2,000 old students," he says.

Next, they organised

Nganwa league plus fundraising dinners in Kampala and Mbarara city. Millions were collected for the bursary scheme and renovations.

But also, class cohorts raise money and donations as well. For example, in 2020, they donated laptops to all class teachers and free internet. They have also established coffee plantation and with Thomas Tayebwa, the deputy speaker of Parliament in lead, they managed to renovate the administration block at sh500m. The block had been burnt during a students' strike.

ST LEO'S KYGObE AND NYAKASURA SCHOOL

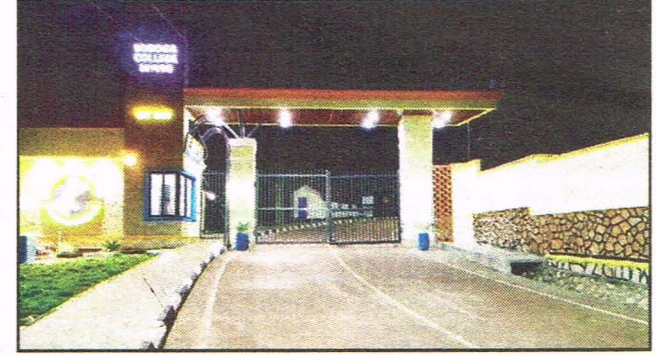
Engineer Emmex Turyatunga, the chairperson of the St Leo's College Kyegobe Old Boys Association (SLECKOBA), says over the last 10 years, they have raised over sh1b to save their 100-year-old school from collapse. It was a giant, but infrastructure decay, sh800m debt, strikes and academic malpractices brought it down.

In fact, the last straw that broke the camel's back was in 2014, when the O'level results were withheld by Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB). Parents withdrew their children and the population plummeted from 1,000 to 190 learners.

"We started by changing the administration and board," Turyatunga says.

"We grouped alumni into elders and seniors and they started contributing."

They also receive support from prominent alumni. For example, Selestino Babungi, the former Umeme managing director, Prof. Venansius Baryamureeba, tourism minister Tom Butime, former minister John Byabagambi and Dr Eng. Silver Mugisha,



The Busoga College Mwiri gate that was built by alumni

the managing director of National Water and Sewerage Corporation, among others, have been supportive just like many in Europe, led by Kangi Patel from the UK.

With that support, SLECKOBA has been able to renovate all the dormitories and sports facilities.

They also pay sh30m every term in school fees for the needy students.

"We plan to build a modern computer lab, memorial building, fence and gate," Turyatunga shares.

Rev. Richardson Balinda, the headteacher at Nyakasura School in Kabarole district, credits the alumni for reviving it.

"They always meet and pool funds, especially during the

homecoming events."

They also organise dinners and invite family and well-wishers to support their projects. But also, there are individuals who go the extra mile. For instance, in 2002, Fenni Birungi of cohort 1965 mobilised sh167m from his family and renovated the headteacher's houses just like businessman Patrick Bitature who revamped the dining and main halls at sh200m. Also, Hannington Karuhanga contributed sh100m, among others.

"The alumni also lobby from friends in Uganda and beyond," he says.

One of them was able to reinforce the school's skilling unit with support from her American friend.

GOVT TO REVAMP 121 SCHOOLS

Dr Denis Mugimba, the education ministry spokesperson, says the renovation of public schools is the responsibility of the Government, but due to the limited resources, they haven't been able to do it routinely. But a few have been supported in a one-off arrangement usually as a pledge by the President.

"But this is not sustainable," he says. Mugimba adds that three years ago, they developed a programme for the renovation of traditional schools which were either built or grant aided by the government from before independence up to about 1982.

"We identified 121 schools and we are going to rehabilitate all of them beginning this year," he adds.