

Nebbi school, neighbour jostle over land

NEBBI. Oweko Primary School in Nd-hew Sub-county, Nebbi District has, for years, been embroiled in a bitter court battle after a claimant began pressing for an extra strip of the school's playground.

Historically, the land in question was donated in 1950 by a section of elders in the community. They offered the land to the missionaries to establish a Catholic Church and the primary school.

Since then, the two institutions were established on the land, which has now turned out to be a centre of conflict. It has taken years for the school to acquire a land title and set up clear boundaries, like fencing.

Between 2002 and 2011, Mr Terence Odaga claimed ownership of the eastern side of the school land, including the playing ground. He dragged the school management committee (SMC) to court, accusing the school of occupying the estimated 2.5 acres of land illegally.

The chairman of the SMC, Mr Bruno Ocen, told *Daily Monitor* at the weekend that the school was built in 1945 by the community, which later handed it over to the missionaries as well as the land hosting it. He said there were no court

cases over the land in question.

"The court issue came in when Odaga encroached on the school land, prompting the school management committee and elders to start the court process to defend the school land from being grabbed," he said.

Mr Ocen said in 2016, when Mr Odaga filed a civil suit against the management of Oweko Primary School in the Nebbi Magistrate's Court, the case was ruled in favour of the school. Court ordered the accused person to pay a fine of Shs5 million to the school.

He said up to now, Mr Odaga hasn't complied with court decisions.

Renewed conflict

"In 2025, when the school management wanted to start processing the land title for the school land, we were blocked because the land still had some questions. This has halted the process," he added.

The head teacher, Ms Roseline Munga-Acel, who was posted to the school three years ago, said the institution has spent more than Shs15 million to facilitate court proceedings, which have become costly to maintain.

GOVT SCHOOLS' LAND

In October 2024, the government started a countrywide exercise for surveying and titling land owned by schools, including untitled land for faith-based institutions.

At that time, Dr Denis Mugimba, the Education ministry spokesperson, said all certificates of land titles for government schools will be kept by the Bank of Uganda for safe custody.

She added that since the money to facilitate court proceedings is from Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) fees, implementing other schools' key priority areas like the construction of latrines and classroom blocks to decongest the learners has become difficult.

"All the PTA activities of the school are currently affected because the money generated by parents is being used to facilitate court proceedings over the school land case. For a rural school like

Oweko, where parents rely mostly on agriculture as a sole source of income for paying fees, it has made administration very difficult," Ms Munga-Acel said last Monday.

The counter accusations

But Mr Odaga, who is accused of criminal trespass (case No 0051 of 2025), said he won a case against the school in 2025, and he has been handed the land legally, which is why he has all the authority to utilise the land.

"The school management failed to challenge the court ruling of 2025 within the 14 days as required by the law, which means the school management was satisfied with the outcome of the court," he insisted.

Mr Odaga claimed that since then, the lives of his family members are at risk and are being threatened by the community members who allegedly burnt his house on the disputed land two weeks ago.

But Mr Ocen said the school is not aware of the case Mr Odaga claims he won last year and he has not produced court documents and a land title to prove ownership.

The Chairman of the PTA, Mr Euzenio Okoth, also accused Mr Odaga of threatening the school's staff.

He added that the construction of staff quarters for the school has since stalled due to the land dispute.

"He doesn't have any court documents to claim the disputed land, and instead it is the school to demand his court compensation because the ruling of 2016 gave the school all the authority to use the land," Mr Okoth said.

The school has about 1,500 learners. The school is financially handicapped to procure desks, construct more classroom blocks, and latrines.

Nebbi District Inspector of Schools James Gwoktho said out of 91 government-aided primary schools in Nebbi, three primary schools of Nyipir, Oweko, and Kom-kec are in court over land disputes.

He added that while local leaders are pushing to secure land titles for all the public schools in the district, they are still facing challenges with foundation bodies that are not cooperating.

"Most of the schools are under churches, and they say the schools have combined land titles with churches. This has made it hard for the district to dictate in processing the titles because of the conditions set by the foundation bodies," Mr Gwoktho said.