

Enhance safety of learners in schools

The tragic incident at Ggaba Infant School in Makindye Division, Kampala, is a painful reminder that our schools are not as safe as we often assume. Institutions meant to nurture, protect and educate our children are increasingly exposing them to preventable risks. This tragedy should, therefore, serve as a national wake-up call to all stakeholders in Uganda's education sector.

As the saying goes, prevention is better than cure, yet the reality before us shows that prevention has been neglected. Evidence from both Uganda and beyond demonstrates that insecurity in schools is not an isolated occurrence, but part of a broader and deeply troubling pattern that demands urgent and deliberate action. According to national data, about 75% of Ugandan children experience some form of violence before the age of 18, including physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Disturbingly, schools are repeatedly identified as one of the environments where this violence occurs, alongside homes and communities.

Despite clear laws banning corporal punishment, nearly 40% of learners report experiencing physical punishment by teachers. This indicates not only weak enforcement of existing policies, but also gaps in supervision and accountability within education institutions. Equally concerning is the



fact that about one third of Ugandan children experience sexual violence before adulthood, with close to a quarter of these incidents taking place at school. Such figures make it impossible to argue that basic security, access control and monitoring are optional extras.

Beyond abuse within school walls, extreme acts of violence have also exposed grave vulnerabilities in school security. Uganda has not been immune. The 2023 attack on Lhubirha Secondary School in Kasese district, which left 42 people dead – 37 of them students, demonstrated how ill-prepared some schools are for serious threats. The recent tragedy at Ggaba, though different in nature, shows that even urban early-childhood centres are at risk when security systems are weak or absent. These incidents prove that schools without layered protection remain dangerously exposed.

The problem extends well beyond Uganda. Across Africa, more than 2,500 attacks on schools have been recorded since 2015, accounting for over a third of all such attacks

worldwide. In West and Central Africa alone, insecurity has forced the closure of over 14,000 schools, denying nearly three million children the right to education. Globally, the situation is deteriorating. Recent United Nations data shows a 44% increase in attacks on schools in a single year, with tens of thousands of incidents of violence against school-age children recorded worldwide.

UNESCO has repeatedly warned that violence in schools directly contributes to poor learning outcomes, high dropout rates and lifelong psychological harm.

These figures lead to one unavoidable conclusion – schools that depend solely on goodwill are failing to protect children. Safety must be deliberately designed, funded, inspected and enforced. Uganda, therefore, needs a layered and proportionate approach to school

security grounded in prevention rather than reaction.

All schools should have trained and vetted security personnel, with police support or patrols provided where risks are high. Every school must operate within a secure perimeter, with fencing and clearly-controlled entry and exit points. Open compounds make meaningful access control impossible and expose learners to unnecessary danger.

Schools should also install CCTV cameras at gates, corridors and key common areas, not as a tool of intimidation, but as a deterrent and accountability mechanism when paired with proper supervision.

In addition, district, division and sub-county security committees should be required to conduct regular inspections of schools, issue compliance reports and guide proprietors on corrective actions.

No new school should be licensed without a

security assessment report confirming that minimum safety standards have been met. Internally, schools should establish security committees composed of administrators, teachers, support staff and, where appropriate, students to continually assess risks, co-ordinate drills and raise early warnings.

At the same time, it is important to strike the right balance. Security must be firm, but humane. Schools should not feel like prisons or military barracks. Research consistently shows that no single measure works on its own and that over-securitisation without safeguarding systems and positive school culture can undermine learning.

The most effective approach combines physical security, clear procedures, trained personnel and strong child-protection mechanisms.

The safety of Ugandan children cannot wait for another tragedy. Government regulators, security agencies, school proprietors, parents and communities must act decisively and together. Strengthening school security is not about fear; it is about responsibility, foresight and protecting the future of our nation. Let the tragedy at Ggaba not fade into memory. Let it mark the moment Uganda chose to make every school a genuinely safe place for learning.

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