FEATURE

School

# Gobero: new school set to change lives in Wakiso village

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Irene Nakiyingi and Vivian Watera have had to endure difficult times since they joined secondary education two years ago.

The two close friends wake up as early as 5:30am and trek about three kilometres from their village in Gobero, Kakiri sub-county to Nampunge community high school in Wakiso district.

This is the only government-aided school in the area. Without this school, the two would stay at home and look after their siblings as the other schools are too far away, yet their parents cannot afford the hefty charges.

"My parents are peasants and do not have enough money for my school fees, transport and lunch. I have to walk or stay at home and look after my grandmother," Nakiyingi says.

And at school, Nakiyingi survives at the mercy of her friends.

"If my friends have some money like Shs 500, we buy pancakes and drink water during lunch time," Nakiyingi explains.

Although Watera's parents at times try to raise the Shs 40,000 charged by the school for lunch, she is not pleased with the meals served.

"We only eat posho and beans. The fried beans and good posho are given to our teachers yet sometimes we miss food because the students are very many in the school," Watera says.

Residents pose for a group photo with the FPA director

## SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

Besides, many of her peers have dropped out of school just because they cannot meet school requirements, including a development fee of Shs 12,000, toilet paper, brooms and reams of papers.

Whenever these 15-year-olds, both in senior two now, reach school after 7am, they are subjected to a number of punishments, including sweeping the school compound, or cleaning toilets and classrooms.

They say since they joined the school, their performance has never impressed their parents. To be promoted to senior two this year, Watera was the 50th while Nakiyingi was the 50th in the class of 144 students.

"Our teachers don't have time for us. They say this is a government school and we should look after ourselves because we are many in the school," Nakiyingi says.

This is coupled with water shortage at school, routine caning and ill-treatment by their teachers.

As they leave school by 5pm, they are troubled with idle youths and mad men, who have since raped their colleagues, road accidents along the busy Hoima road, among others.

## FREE SCHOOL

Nakiyingi and Watera are likely to overcome these hurdles this year – thanks to the Family Preservation Alliance-Uganda (FPA), an organization that has constructed the first secondary school in their village.

At the grand opening of the school in Wakiso recently, Carrie West, the FPA director, said the school would be free of charge to the most vulnerable families.

The school, Family Preservation Alliance Academy of Excellence, will assist residents of Gobero with access to local, quality education, vocational training and micro-enterprise opportunities.

Carrie, a US-based donor, believes that setting up a free school in the area is vital for its sustainability.

"We believe that when basic human needs are met within struggling communities, families are better positioned to care for, protect and raise their children in a cooperative effort to avoid footing in of human traffickers," Carrie said.

With a motto *"Transforming lives through educational excellence"*, the school is open for admissions this academic year.

According to Carrie, the school will also provide lunch and porridge for its students, something that most schools in the area are still struggling with.

She attributed the formation of the school to cooperative efforts made possible by her dedicated US board members, the generosity of US donors and the FPA Uganda coordinator, Jackson Basse.

Basse acknowledged that the school would start with students from senior one to three as they prepare to bring on more classes with time.

The school, sitting on about 3.5 acres, is currently housing the three classrooms, an office, a laboratory, sick bay, teachers' quarters and a 45,000-litre tank.

Henry Ssempijja Lwanga, the deputy district education officer for Wakiso district, says the school has come as a blessing to the residents of Gobero.

"We have over 3,000 schools in the district but in terms of post-primary education, we have very few. In most of the parishes, there are no secondary schools and our resource envelope is constrained to construct schools," Ssempijja explains.

He is, however, pleased that there is at least a government-aided school in all the sub-counties of the district.

Ssempijja urges the directors and teachers to be committed enough for the school can go a long way in providing quality education to the people in the area.

He requests government to provide some instructional materials such as textbooks and science apparatus to the school since it is less of a USE school.

Kakiri sub-county has about 20 Universal Primary Education schools and only three Universal Secondary Education schools, according to Ssempijja.

## WHY THE SCHOOL?

In 2009, Carrie traveled to Uganda with a US-based agency whose mission was to assist women who were living and working in a dangerous stone quarry outside of Kampala.

The organization, she says, was supposed to help this community with relocation efforts, vocational training, among others.

"After my short stay in Uganda, I believed that this agency was more interested in helping themselves to the children of the quarry, rather than assist their mothers, so that they could care for their own children," she recalls.

She adds that the agency, (now closed) referred children to prospective adoptive parents outside the US and failed to exercise due diligence in determining the legality of their placements.

Carrie says the adoptions were later halted by the US embassy.

Her experience during that time forced her to source for funds and empower vulnerable families, so that they are less likely to exploitation.

According to Eroni Semate, the Gobero Lc-1 chairman, Carrie's desire to help Ugandans came at a time when his village had no secondary school.

When he was approached for consultations to set up a primary or vocational school in his area, he instead advised the team to construct a secondary school.

"Whenever children complete their primary levels, those who cannot walk long distances to secondary schools drop out of a school, get married or ride *boda bodas*," Semate says. "We couldn't miss this chance of secondary school constructed in our village."

FPA has also set up a number of projects in the area that have benefited mostly women like passion fruits and mushroom growing as well as constructing houses for the elderly, feeding them and children in the neighboring primary schools.

Semate says many students will be willing to join the new school, given its attractive permanent structures and water facilities that are missing in most government schools.

Nakiyingi and Watera have already been assured by their parents that they would be joining the new secondary school that is just a stone's throw away from their homes.

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