

Lake Bunyonyi pupils get life jackets

KABALE

By Job Namanya

On September 27, four girls narrowly escaped death when their boat capsized on their way to school.

The girls were wearing life jackets they had earlier on received during the campaign.

Desire Orikiriza, a Primary Six pupil at the school, was on board with her friends when the nasty incident occurred.

They had opted for a canoe to school after missing the school boat.

"The only thing that saved us was the life jackets. One of us did not know how to swim, but we kept on helping each other as we floated on top of water," she narrated.

They were rescued by a motorboat from the neighbouring Lake Bunyonyi Secondary School.

Hope for the future

Thanks to the fundraising efforts of Doreen Bellindah, the executive director of Africa Tourist Club a campaign dubbed "Uganda for Bunyonyi Kids" was launched in July.

Through this, a total of 244 life jackets and a motorboat were on Saturday donated to pupils of Bwama Primary School in Kabale district to



Bwama Primary School pupils aboard the newly-donated motorboat and wearing the life jackets they had just received on Saturday. Photos by Job Namanya

assist them in crossing Africa's second deepest lake daily.

Bellindah said she was inspired by the various media reports about the vulnerability of the children who had difficulties in crossing the lake while going to school.

"We were so touched after watching a BBC documentary about them. Later, other local media houses kept bringing to light the plight of these children," she said.

Since the launch of the campaign, volunteers were

supporting the drive that aimed at raising 500 life jackets in one year.

The first batch of 24 life jackets were delivered at the school during the launch of the campaign. Since then, the school has been struggling with getting the rest of the jackets to assist all learners.

Among the key contributors to the campaign was the Global Livingston Institute that contributed 100 life jackets and a 40-seater motorboat, Harris International that donated 50

life jackets and others were raised by individuals.

Johnson Byambala, the Bwama Primary School headteacher, said accessing the school has been a struggle due to lack of life jackets and a reliable means of transport.

"In the five years I have served here, pupils at times miss school whenever the water is turbulent," he said.

Byambala added that with the use of canoes, pupils have been coming late to school and they could also delay to

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Brian Ahimbisibwe, resident: We are grateful to all good-hearted people who are working to ensure that these children attend school.

Jean Tukamushaba, social worker: God blesses a cheerful giver and whoever embraced this cause will be greatly rewarded by the Almighty God for reaching out to the vulnerable.

Merivian Turyagumanawe, pupil: We are now safe when travelling to school. I believe that we shall be able to improve our performance with this intervention.

to authorities, this is mainly limited by the fear among parents to take their children to this risky environment.

"Most parents feel that their children are not safe studying at this school," said Byambala.

Pupils escape death

Other safety interventions
Apart from the life jackets contribution, intensive swimming lessons co-ordinated by Entusi Resort in collaboration with other local rescuers are ongoing to equip the children with skills in case of an accident.

Reagan Nowamani, the Entusi Resort director, said they were compelled to train the children on how to swim so as to ensure safety across the lake.

"We regularly employ local and international swimmers to train the children. We believe that by the end of these lessons, more children will be able to acquire basic safety skills," Nowamani said.

The parent and teachers association has also passed a sh2,000 fee for every pupil per term to go towards maintenance and fuelling of the motorboat.

The African Development Bank donated sh2m towards the same cause.

go back home in times of bad weather.

"There are cases when the official school canoes leave some pupils when they arrive late at the various stages. These are compelled to use other boats," Byambala said.

The school has an enrolment of 206 pupils and according