



Shut. St James Bwaise Church of Uganda Primary School, one of the schools that was closed recently. PHOTO BY ABUBAKER LUBOWA

No hope. The closure of this school has left area residents at a loss with their children stranded now roaming on the streets.

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Bwaise pupils stranded as public school remains closed

KAMPALA. As you manoeuvre through the dilapidated buildings and the drainage channels behind Tusky's Supermarket branch in Bwaise, a low-set suburban of Kampala, a tall flat abandoned building welcomes your sight.

Some of the windows and doors on the eight-classroom block are smashed while the paint on the walls has since peeled off. Inside the library, the text books are torn and dusty.

The classrooms on the ground floor are submerged in dirty water, making the place a no-go area for pupils.

The silence at this school is only broken by the hooting of the cars from the main road and the noise of children from the neighbourhood.

Such is the situation that now characterises St James Church of Uganda Primary School in Bukasa Zone, Kawempe Division.

Flooding

The school was closed in 2013 by Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) due to continuous flooding. Bwaise, which lies north of Kampala, is synonymous with flooding.

The closure of the school, which had an enrolment of 700 pupils, has left area residents at a loss with their children roaming the streets in Kawempe because they cannot afford high fees charged by majority of private schools in the area.

Daily Monitor understands that KCCA is currently racing against time to have the school either reopened

after improving on the drainage system or relocated to another place to enable children get a better learning environment.

The other government-aided primary school is located in Kazo near Kawempe, which doubles the distance the pupils have to walk to school, compelling many of them to drop out of school.

Costly private schools

Ms Angella Namubiru, 34, a house wife and mother of three, says all her children have dropped out of school because she does not have money to take them to private schools, which she said charge between Shs100,000 and Shs200,000 in lower primary school per term.

"I sell charcoal but with little capital. This makes it hard for me to take my two children to school. When this school was closed by authorities, our children remained stranded because it used to be the only public school in the area. I took one [child] to a simple private nursery school but I am chocking on debts," Ms Namubiru says.

Ms Namubiru's ordeal is shared by majority of parents in Bwaise, who are seeking help from government to have the school relocated to some other place so that they could access education.

One of the former pupils, Isma Kabugo, who dropped out in Primary Four after the closure of the school,

KCCA SPEAKS OUT

In the pipeline: Mr Peter Kauju, the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) spokesperson, told this newspaper that although the authority is working out modalities to re-open this school, it might take quite some time as they are still engaging the church on the same matter.

"We can't risk the lives of our children in such a flooding environment but we are in touch with church to see what we could do next. Our mandate as KCCA is to see children study in a healthy environment. St James Primary School is among one of our priorities. I can assure Bwaise residents that we are planning for that school," he said.

He added that their engineers are on ground to contain the flooding levels of the area to pave way for other developments.

said he now wants to concentrate on business, adding that the four years have affected his concentration on learning.

"I now make chapatti with my friends and they give me Shs2,000 per day as my wage. I want to save this money and start my own stall of chapatti because this is the only way I will survive since my fortune for education was cut when our school was closed," he says.

Ms Jalia Nansamba, another parent says: "Our elected leaders should really help us push for the re-opening of our school because we voted for

them to help us solve such problems that affect society."

St James Church of Uganda was serving three parishes of Bwaise I, II and III.

It was constructed by PLAN Uganda in 1998 to help children of Kawempe Division, especially Bwaise, access free education services.

The school was closed during KCCA's first phase of the Kampala Institutional Infrastructural Development Project to upgrade the drainage system.

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Saving lives

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However, though abandoned,

the school has remained under the supervision of Mr George William Kalule, 66, who is the guard and sleeps in the school library. He sweeps the compound every morning.

The Kawempe Division mayor, Mr Charles Serunjogi, says he is in touch with the KCCA to have the school reopened.

"St James [primary school] is the only government school in the area but ever since it was closed, many children have since lost hope for education. As leaders, we are working hard to have this school reopened. Government must prioritise education for our children by intervening when such situations happen. A lot of funding must also be given to KCCA because the funds are at times little, leaving many projects to stall," he says.

700

NUMBER OF PUPILS WHO WERE ENROLLED AT THE TIME THE SCHOOL CLOSED

According to statistics from KCCA, there are 79 primary schools in the city. However, majority of these schools have fallen victim of land grabbing, something that continues to worry city residents, especially the urban poor.

All city schools are managed by KCCA under the directorate of education and social services whose core mandate is to provide, support, guide, coordinate, regulate and promote quality education, sports, recreation and tourism activities to the community in Kampala City that are geared towards individual and national development.