

New Vision in partnership with the Irish Embassy, Travelcare and Trócaire is searching for Uganda's most innovative teacher. Every Wednesday, we shall profile some of the nominated teachers until August when a panel of judges shall select the best. A total of top 12 teachers will each win sh1.5m. The five most outstanding teachers will enjoy an all-expenses paid study trip to Ireland early next year. Today, Gloria Nakajubi brings you Robert Wuubo, who took on the responsibility of keeping girls in school and making sure they keep good hygiene.

Now a certified nurse working in Moroto, Christine Ngorok would probably have been another of the so many girls to drop out of school, especially in the most vulnerable part of the country such as Karamoja.

"When my father died, my stepbrothers mistreated me. They did not want me to go back to school. They would beat up my mother and I until we could take it no more and had to relocate," Ngorok says.

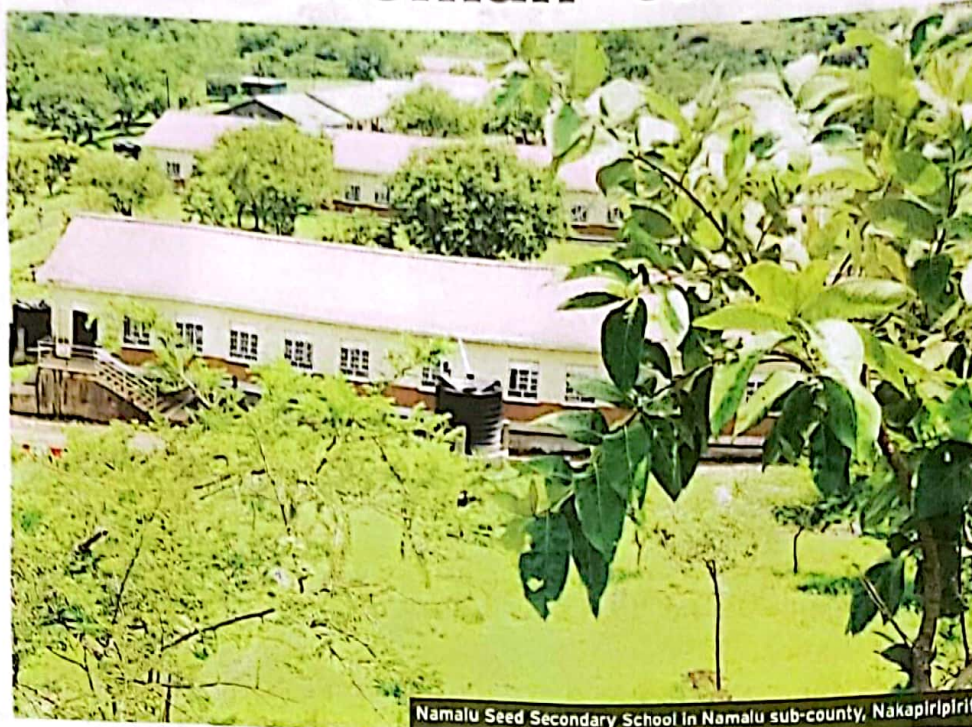
She was one of the first girls at Namalu Seed School in Karamoja region.

It was barely a term after she had joined secondary school that her stepbrothers burnt her mattress and scholastic materials.

"They also took all the money my mother had which was meant to help me get back to school," she says.

"I did not go back to school that term. It was frustrating. My mother was weak and cash-strapped," she recalls.

Robert Wuubo: The male 'senior woman' teacher



Namalu Seed Secondary School in Namalu sub-county, Nakapiripirit

Tracking down Ngorok

When Robert Wuubo noticed one of his students was missing, he got concerned.

He asked the other students where Ngorok lived and traced her to their new place.

"He came home and we told him what had happened. He counselled my mother and I. Wuubo later got me a sponsor and that is how I survived dropping out of school," Ngorok says.

Wuubo, according to Ngorok, is a teacher who took care of each of the girls' challenges and continuously motivated them to aspire for higher goals.

For seven years, Wuubo had

taken on the role traditionally meant for female teachers. He was not only the go-to teacher for girls, trying to understand their body changes, guidance and counselling, but also ensuring that they stay in school.

In 2003, when Namalu Seed Secondary School in Namalu sub-county, Nakapiripirit was created, seven teachers led by Raymond Korob, the area education officer,

set out to offer services at the new institution. However, none of the seven teachers was female. Wuubo took up the challenge; he was going to be the 'senior woman teacher'.

Children, especially girls, take much more convincing to stay in schools in Karamoja.

"Many of the girls we received at school would easily drop out. They would either be married off or kept at home

to do domestic chores. But also, going through their menstrual days at school was a challenge," Wuubo says.

Wuubo, who is a history teacher, opted to find a solution to this. With a community strong on practices such as early marriage, the school was perceived as an enemy.

In a bid to fail it, the school was allocated land in a rocky place atop a hill.

Buying knickers

Wuubo interacted with the girls using the education ministry's student survival kit and handled issues such as general health.

Then came the challenge of knickers. Given the setting, it was hard for the girls to access knickers, so Wuubo decided to buy them and sell to the girls at a subsidised price.

However, he later found out that many could not afford the knickers, so he ended up giving them out for free.

From nine girls in 2003, the numbers kept on increasing. This meant new challenges,

"I did not go back to school that term. It was frustrating."

Christine Ngorok



Robert Wuubo

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Andrew Omogin, teacher

When Wuubo said there was free food and housing at the school, I could not resist. But it was tough from the onset. However, because of him, I was able to adjust to life in the area.



Rose Irlama, Former MP

If you find a teacher, especially one from another region serving in Karamoja, you know they truly have the heart for teaching. Wuubo is one of them. Things might have improved a little, but the early 2000s were challenging because teachers had to struggle to have children in school.

Raymond Korob, former headteacher
Wuubo is one of the most committed and patient, teachers at the school. He understands learners' challenges and responds with empathy.

especially in hygiene. "Working with the sanitation prefect at the time, who was a girl, I had to explain extensively for them to understand that after wearing knickers, they had to be washed and dried," Wuubo explains. With a salary of sh350,000 per month, Wuubo had allocated 10% to respond to children's demands.

Offering meals

Wuubo noticed that children in the community would flock his and other teachers' homes to have a meal. It was also because of hunger that some children had dropped out of school.

"I came up with a policy. I would distribute seeds to the families and on harvest, we would share on a 3:1 ratio (family and me respectively). That means if they harvested three basins of green grams, they would give me one."

This not only saw more children enrol, but also made retention in school a little more sustainable.

At the time, they had to share with the nearest water source. However, after realising that as a result, girls were falling victim to rapists and defilers in the community, he lobbied to have them exempted from collecting water. The girls would only go to the borehole in the company of a teacher.

The school is surrounded by trees, which was Wuubo's initiative. This was after the winds blew off a roof.

The trees were to shield the school from harsh winds. And as explained by Andrew Omogin, one of the teachers at the school, if it was not for the trees, may be the school would be no more.

"People used to think that nothing could grow on these rocks. But together with the students, Wuubo was able to grow trees and these have helped to keep the school standing," Omogin says.

FACT FILE

- Wuubo was born in Manafwa district
- 1997: He joined Nkozi National Teachers College
- 1999: Graduated with a diploma in secondary education.
- 2000: Taught at Kayenje Secondary School and Ntanda College School in Mpigi district
- 2000: Wuubo joined Bugishu Progressive School in Nakaloke
- 2000-2002: Wuubo joined Uganda Christian University, Mukono for a bachelor of arts degree in education
- He joined Namalu Seed Secondary School
- 2013: Transferred to Moroto High School
- Wuubo had a brief stint at Kisowera Secondary School, but was transferred back to Moroto High as a deputy headteacher