Tororo leaders on the spot over giveaway of public land

The contested land reportedly belongs to several public institutions.

BY JOSEPH OMOLLO

Authorities in Tororo Municipal Council are under scrutiny for allegedly allocating public land belonging to key institutions to private developers, raising concern among education stakeholders and residents.

The contested land reportedly belongs to several public institutions, including Oguti Primary School, Rock View School, Elgon View Primary School, King George Memorial Stadium, Children's Lion Park, and Tororo Hospital land in Nyangole Sub-county.

At Oguti Primary School, a Church of Uganda-founded institution established in 1958, part of the land is said to have been subdivided into plots and leased to private developers. This particular case has sparked widespread concern among parents, school administrators, and local leaders.

Tororo Municipality Mayor Kennedy Orono Nyapidi, in an interview at the weekend, distanced the current leadership from the allocations, instead attributing the decisions to former political leaders and technical officers.

According to Mr Nyapidi, available records indicate that in 1999, the council held a meeting with individuals who had earlier been allocated the school land. It was resolved that the occupants would either be compensated or relocated to alternative land to pave way for the redevelopment of the school playground.

"This is fraudulent because, in the first place, the school belongs to Tororo Municipal Council. I also wonder how authorities went ahead to lease out part of the school land to private developers," he said.

He added that several cases, including disputes over Amagoro Primary School and Children's Lion Park land, are already before court. Meanwhile, the matter concerning Tororo Hospital land in Nyangole Sub-county is being handled by the State House Anti-Corruption Unit.

"Most of these cases are being handled, and we are waiting for the outcomes," Mr Nyapidi said.

He further revealed that the council has embarked on a phased process to secure land titles for all public land to prevent future encroachment, depending on the availability of resources.

However, stakeholders at Oguti Primary School said the damage had already been done. Mr Ernest Osinde Odwest, chairperson of the school's Parent-Teachers Association (PTA), said the disputed land mainly comprises the school playground, which has been in use for sports and co-curricular activities since the school's inception.

"The dispute over ownership with the developers has greatly affected the school's development and learners, especially in co-curricular activities," he said.

Education stakeholders also argue that the ongoing wrangle has hindered planned infrastructural developments at the school.

Last week, the school attempted to fence off the disputed land following a resolution passed during a annual general meeting aimed at improving safety for learners and staff. However, the move was met with resistance from individuals claiming ownership of the land.

Mr Osinde expressed concern over the legitimacy of the developers' claims, noting that they reportedly hold land titles.

"I am not convinced that council authorities are unaware of this saga. How did the developers obtain land titles? We no longer have trust in our council because how can you give out school land to private individuals?" he asked.

During a crisis meeting held last week, the school's head teacher, Ms Helen Lunyolo, disclosed that part of the land was leased out in the early 1990s without the consent of school authorities.

"I am not the spokesperson, but I am deeply concerned. I am not comfortable heading a school where children cannot fully participate in co-curricular activities. Some learners may not excel academically but are talented in sports," she said.

Ms Lunyolo added that efforts to fence the land have been frustrated by repeated acts of vandalism, with unknown individuals reportedly destroying sections of the fence under the cover of darkness.

An alumna of the school, Ms Lillian Atim, described the allocation of school land as a direct attack on an institution that has played a vital role in shaping responsible citizens.

"Part of this land served as a school garden where we carried out agricultural practice. It is disturbing to see it being taken away. How did council authorities lease it to private developers?" she wondered.

Local leaders have also weighed in on the matter. Mr Noah Okumu, the LC5 councillor representing Western Division in Tororo District, vowed to push for the recovery of all public land allocated fraudulently.

"We are going to fight to reclaim public land. I appeal to government investigative agencies to intervene and establish how this land was leased out," he said.

He further called for accountability, arguing that officials involved in the alleged illegal allocations should be arrested and prosecuted.

"Those who parcelled out this land, knowing it belongs to schools and a hospital, must face the law," Mr Okumu added.



Leaders visit a dispute piece of land at Oguti Primary School in Tororo District. PHOTO/ JOSEPH OMOLLO

AFFECTED INSTITUTIONS

- Oguti Primary School
- Rock View School
- Elgon View Primary School
- King George Memorial Stadium
- Children's Lion Park
- Tororo Hospital (Nyangole Sub-county)

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