

# Sophisticated racket targets school land, probe team told

By Andante Okanya and Edward Anyoli

A sophisticated racket of land grabbers is targeting Kampala schools which possess prime land, the Justice Catherine Bamugemereire land probe team has heard.

Yesterday, the racket's unscrupulous work methods were revealed. The chairperson of Nakasero Primary School management committee (SMC), Joel Ssekabembe, explained how part of the school playground area was a subject of contention.

Asked by lead counsel Ebert Byenkya to elaborate, Ssekabembe claimed businessman Ephraim Ntaganda colluded with officials from Uganda Land Commission (ULC), Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and education ministry.

Ssekabembe said Ntaganda's company, Prestigious Apartments Limited, used the guise of charity, partnership and subsequently claimed the land on Plot 34A1 Kyadondo and 5C Mackinnon Road.

He said in a letter dated April 19, 2011, Ntaganda gave a hint of the company's intentions by offering to replace the school's asbestos roofing with iron roofing as a good neighbour.

"The letter aroused suspicion and we realised that the plot was the one which had part of our playground," Ssekabembe said, noting that the entire playground sits on two acres.

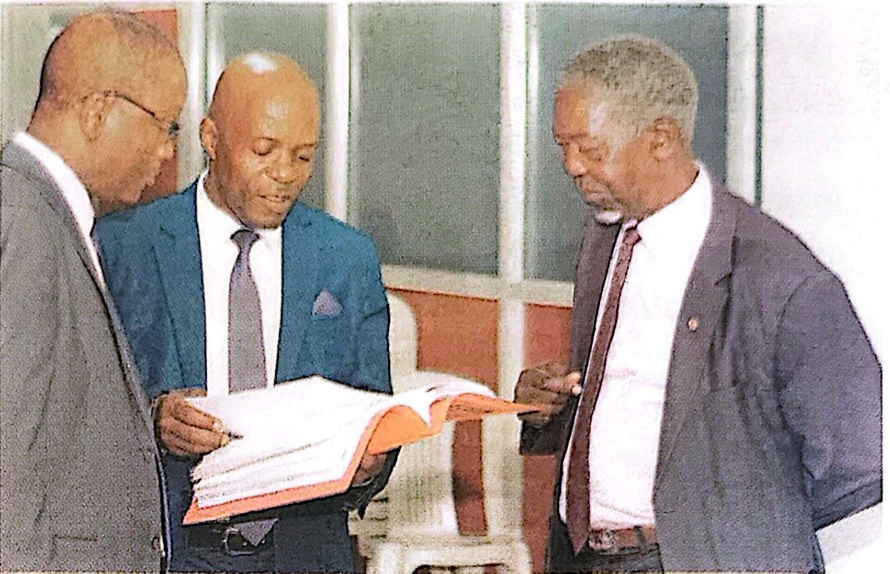
He said the SMC declined the offer on the premise that the school had the capability to accomplish such a task by taking a bank loan or through KCCA.

Ssekabembe lamented that ULC and Prestigious Apartments did not have the courtesy to involve the SMC in negotiations for lease of the land.

Prodded further on what SMC made of the charitable offer, Ssekabembe said his team made a jaw-dropping discovery.

"The information we found was startling. The company had been incorporated on August 5, 2010 and applied to ULC for land on August 16, 2010. We wondered why things were moving so fast. On August 19, 2010, they were given a letter of no objection by the

Former Nakasero Primary School headteacher David Ssengendo shows a document to the current headteacher, Charles Ssengendo (left) and Ssekabembe. Photo by Denis Dibebe



education ministry," Ssekabembe stated.

He said in a twist of events, Prestigious sold its interests to another company, Emirates Developers Limited, who later had Ntaganda as one of its directors.

Ssekabembe named the racketeers as Paul Idude of ULC, Night Alice of KCCA, and John Agaba of the education ministry.

He stressed that in a letter dated October 25, 2011, addressed to the Nakasero headteacher dismissed claims that the school land had been grabbed.

Ssekabembe noted that Idude remarked that Prestigious Apartments had obtained a lease on the land and advised the SMC to liaise with the company to draw boundaries.

Ssekabembe said on account of such ULC conduct, the school used chain link to fence off the whole playground.

He said Agaba and Alice issued dubious letters of no objection to the lease, which created the impression that the school had been consulted, whereas not.

The SMC chairperson accused some of the members of the school's then SMC of grabbing the land.

*"I do not want to be part of this fraud. For goodness sake, cancel this fraudulent deal."*

Permanent secretary

Ssekabembe said he, together with the then headmaster, David Ssengendo, vehemently opposed the move.

Ssekabembe disclosed that in a letter dated December 2, 2011, the then education ministry permanent secretary Francis Lubanga distanced himself from the letter of no objection, saying ULC should have conducted due diligence.

Lubanga said: "Do not muddle the waters. I do not want to be part of this fraud. For goodness

The other city schools that have surfaced as victims of land grabbing include Buganda Road Primary School, Kitante Secondary School, and City High School.

The commissioners are Robert Ssebunya, Mary Oduka Ochan, Joyce Gunze Habaasa, Dr Rose Nakayi, Frederick Ruhindi and George Bagonza Tinkamanyire.

John Bosco Suuz is assistant lead counsel. Judiciary Deputy Registrar of planning and development Olive Kazaarwe Mukwaya heads the secretariat.

Hearing continues.

**Commission mandate**

The commission's mandate is to probe efficiency of the laws, policies and processes of land registration, acquisition, administration and management.

It is also tasked with inquiring the effectiveness of the ULC in administering public land and relevant bodies in the reservation of wetlands,