



Putting Mum On Game

HOW UGANDAN TEENS ARE QUIETLY RUNNING FAMILY TECH SUPPORT.

PHOTO GENERATED BY GOOGLE BANANA / PROMPT BY HUMPHREY WAMPULA

BY RITAH NAMUKASA

There is an unspoken arrangement in many Ugandan homes. Mum handles the rent, the food, the school fees, and the emotional weather of the entire household. You, in return, handle the phone. It is not written anywhere. It does not need to be. The moment a screen freezes or an update notification appears, her eyes find you across the room like a compass finding north. This Mother's Day, teens from schools around the country share exactly how that arrangement plays out.

When the phone becomes the problem.

The distress calls usually start small. A frozen app. A full storage. A locked screen with no obvious explanation. Conrad Muwanguzi of Genesis Christian School International has seen both ends of that panic: "My mum had been using the same password to unlock her phone, but one day, it jammed. She tried everything she could in vain. I intervened, went to the emergency calls and unlocked it. She was surprised. Another time, her apps froze. None worked and this

irritated her. I again fixed the problem, making her happy."

What Conrad describes in two calm sentences is, for the parent involved, a minor crisis with no manual. The phone is not just a phone. It holds contacts, mobile money, church groups, and the WhatsApp thread with her sisters in the village. When it freezes, everything freezes with it.

Anitah Betty Namubiru of St. Mbuga Vocational Secondary School met a version of this confusion that required more diplomacy than technical skill:

"During the recent

Easter break, mum feared her phone was spoiled. It wasn't ringing but she would see missed calls. I realized she had unknowingly put it in the 'Don't disturb' mode. She also wondered why there was a 'plane' on her screen. I told her that it is the flight mode and explained what it means."

The phone was fine. It was simply doing exactly what it had been told to do.

When the stakes get higher.

Not every tech call is about a frozen screen. Renella Nsengiyunwa, also of Genesis Christian

School International, found herself and her sister troubleshooting something considerably more stressful:

"One day, someone tried to poison our dog. Mum switched on the TV to watch the camera footage but the TV blacked out. She failed to fix it. I later realized she had been putting in the wrong password. Dad was away and he wasn't picking his calls. Mum was getting stressed. My sister and I sorted out the problem."

A wrong password, a worried mother, a dog in danger, a father unreachable. The solution required a teenager who

could stay calm when everyone else could not.

Juliana Assumani Atosha of St. Mbuga Vocational Secondary School operated across a language barrier that most tech problems don't come with:

"Recently, dad asked mum to look for some files on his computer. He was away in Congo. Mummy struggled and failed to find them. They were in excel which she did not know how to read because she speaks French. I used my computer skills to dig it up and also taught her how to operate her iPhone 15."

Excel. In French. For a father in another country. Sorted.

>> CONTINUED ON PAGE 18.