

BOXING DAY BEACH DEATHS:



BY CHARLES ETUKURI

When 14-year-old Arafat Kabonge's friends turned up at his mother Florence Nakajugo's home in Wakaliga B in Kampala on December 26 to take him to the beach, she declined because she did not want her only child to go out on that day. She feared all would not end well.

"He was my only son and I never wanted him out of my sight. But he insisted he wanted to go. I knew this would create a rift between us and I did not want to see him unhappy so I gave him some money just in case," she recalls.

Kabonge then left for Aero beach in Entebbe, together with his friends.

According to Brian Sekiziyivu, one of those who was with Kabonge, the boys started planning in November to go to the beach on Boxing Day.

"When we reached the beach, all of us jumped into the lake to swim, but Kabonge was hesitant. However, because of pressure and teasing from his friends, he also jumped into the lake," Sekiziyivu said.

Kabonge a student at Lubiri Secondary School had just completed Senior Two and had been promoted to Senior Three. His father Abubaker Ssenfuma, who is based in South Africa had sent his mother money for the holiday celebrations and a school fees for the first term that starts in February.

After 7:00pm, his friends gathered to leave, but Kabonge could not be found. "We waited for him in vain. We made announcements, we still could not locate him so we thought he had decided to

go home," Sekiziyivu added. When he failed to turn up at home on Saturday evening, his family together with friends decided to go to Aero beach to search for him.

"The beach management denied us entry. I was not the only one with a missing relative, who had just been seen here, but all of us were restricted entry," Nakajugo said.

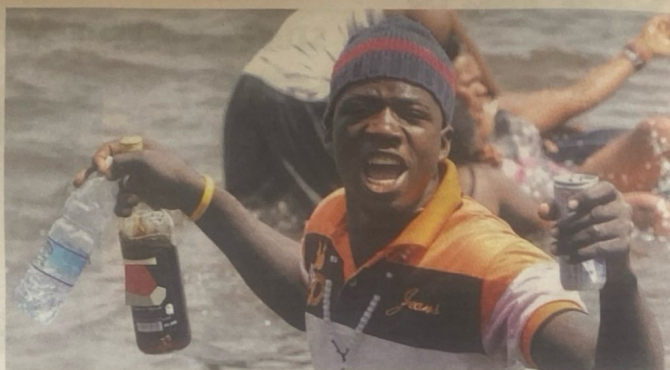
Eventually, they yielded to pressure and allowed them in. While searching for him, Kabonge's body was swept to the shore that evening.

Another body that was swept to the shore was of 27-year-old Abubaker Ssensonga, who sat his Senior Four final examinations at Busega Secondary School and was waiting for results. Ssensonga and his friends had spent two months planning for the trip to Entebbe. Ssensonga too had saved money and together with friends had hired a taxi to take them to the beach.

"We got to the beach at about 2:00pm, but did not have swimming costumes and opted to sit down and wait. There was a lot of commotion at the beach at the time and people were drunk. But as evening set in, Ssensonga decided to give swimming a try. He took off his clothes and joined the others in the water. We did not see him again," explained Apollo Mutawe, who was with the deceased.

They then approached the beach management and made an announcement on the beach public address system, but they got no response. They returned home without him and only learnt the next day that he was among those whose bodies had been recovered.

By Wednesday, Police had recovered 14 bodies although they continued receiving reports of missing persons. Apart from Aero beach, more bodies littered the shores of Lido, Sports and Speenah beaches.



Some revellers at beaches get into the water to swim when they are already drunk and as a result are not strong enough to fight waves



When one falls in the water, fellow swimmers may rescue them to the lake shores

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were of Brian Nsubuga, Allan Muhiru, Ssensonga, Haruna Muhiru, Sula Kato, Kabonge, Richard Ssenyondo, Abdul Wokoyeri, Abubaker Sensonyiwa and Sande Migambi. The other three had not yet been identified by press time.

WHAT WENT WRONG? According to residents, during the festive season and weekends, hundreds of patrons flock the beaches. Last Christmas holiday, celebrations at the different beaches in Entebbe started on December 23 and climaxed

on December 26. The road to Entebbe was a beehive of activity with hundreds of revellers going to beaches.

Each of the beaches had guest artists performing. As the different people streamed in with their families, the beach owners cared little about their safety and some of the revellers changed attire and jumped into the lake for fun.

Musa Matembe, one of the revellers, who was at Aero says by 5:00pm the beach was bursting at seams with revellers.

"I was at Aero beach and there was crowd, but wherever I looked I saw drunk people, while some smoked marijuana. After paying to get in, I left immediately with my family to Speenah because we thought it was more decent, but we were wrong," said Sumaya Matovu, one of the revellers.

An employee of Speenah beach, who declined to be named said they tried to control the crowds that had moved into the lake when the waves were rising.

"Police and security came in to chase them out of the water, but while some left the water following the warning, others swam further into the lake," the source said.

Experts say wave action can cause loss of footing, which can lead to drowning.

One of the beach managers, Joseph Omuna, said the day started well and they did not expect that such a tragedy would befall them.

"We had a good time and did not expect this," Omuna said.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED?



Some swimmers wear masks while in the water and cannot be identified

Most victims drowned in the evening when excitement went a notch higher.

POLICE COMB AREA

On Tuesday, a Police special team led by the deputy criminal investigations and

intelligence department, Godfrey Musana, had a meeting with the beach owners together with the dwellers and officials of Entebbe municipality. A decision was taken to temporarily suspend

operations of the beaches as Police treated them as crime scenes.

But even as Police claimed they had closed the beaches, there was entertainment on almost all the beaches, in Entebbe.



Beach managements do not limit the number of people who get into the beach and into the water

WHO IS TO BLAME?

In a sudden twist of events, the beach owners say the bodies could have been brought from different areas and dumped near their beaches or drifted with the lake waves from afar to the shores next to their beaches.

Lido beach's manager, David Kanonya, who was among those in Entebbe for a meeting said they had deployed on both Christmas and Boxing Day. He insisted that management only received a report of one missing person. That person had gone missing at Aero beach and not Lido.

Cornelius Lorika Kodet, the owner of Aero beach, also said the bodies may have drifted from somewhere else.

According to the Entebbe Aviation Police station chief, Gloria Turinawe, the management of the beaches were to blame for the laxity that led to the drowning incidents.

She said the bar owners had defied Police directives and warning requiring them to ensure safety and provide life jackets to revellers, who wanted to go swimming.

She also said the beach owners were supposed to ensure the presence of experienced lifeguard, who supervises the safety and rescue of swimmers.

Turinawe said all the beach owners were required to stop the revellers from going to the waters by 6:00pm to ensure their safety. She also says they failed to put in place limits on how far into the water people are allowed to swim.

Sunday Vision has also learnt that many of those who were at the beach on the fatal day did not know how to swim and underestimated the strength of waves and depth of water hence getting into trouble.

Some of the revellers also blamed Police and the army for triggering of panic when they stormed the lake to chase out revellers.

"Some instead of running away moved deeper into the water," Mutawe one of the survivors said.

Police spokesman, Fred Enanga, confirmed the eye witnesses accounts that revellers refused to leave the waters and decided to swim far from the shores where they could not be limited.

The Entebbe municipality and Wakiso district who licensed the beaches took part of the blame for failure to ensure that they are not managed in accordance to the law. Despite several other deaths as a result of drowning, and rape cases reported in the media, little or no action had been taken. They also seemed to have taken no action on complaints that beer was being sold to children below the age of 18 years, who even took drugs while at the beaches.

Investigations reveal that most of the revellers first consumed alcohol before going to swim. "You cannot swim when drunk and some of the revellers thought that the deeper they went the more fun they had. The wave would sweep people off their feet and being unable to swim they would drown," says Abdu Lutwama who lost two friends.

Another reveller at Speenah told Sunday Vision that some of the dead could have been drowned by a group of rowdy youth believed to be part of the Kileleshwa criminal gang.

"That gang had on that day specialised in undressing women in the water and raping them. I saw one of the youth being beaten as he attempted to save his sister, who had been dragged deeper into the water," Lutwama, who we found at Speenah said.

Some of the relatives of the deceased who spoke to Sunday Vision confirmed that they found scratches on the necks of the bodies that were handed over to them - an indication that some of them may have been drowned.

Some beaches like Busabala beach owned by singer Bobi Wine's are renowned areas where women are raped but little or no action has been taken.

Will these deaths serve as a wake-up call? The public awaits a solution.



NOTICE OF PLENARY SITTING

This is to inform all Members of Parliament that there will be Plenary sitting on Wednesday, 06th January 2016 at 2.00p.m., to consider the Budget Framework Paper and the Loan requests.

You are requested to keep time.

Jane L. Kibirige
Clerk to Parliament
03rd January 2016

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