

The agricultural programme has attracted pupils, who are transferring the skills to their communities



St Theresa Mende pupils display their vegetable harvest. (In set) Naluyima admiring the pupils' matooke project

Adoptable ideas

By Nelson Kiva

Some schools in Uganda have chunks of land they do not use, but the case is different at St Theresa Mende Primary School in Mende sub-county, Wakiso district.

Josephine Nantumbwe, the school headteacher, boasts of her school scoring highly in utilising their three-acre piece of land for modern agriculture.

"We plant bananas, cassava, potatoes, fruits and vegetables using modern farming practices," Nantumbwe said.

She added that through a permaculture programme that the school started this year, part of their garden has been designed for growing vegetables, such as *nakati* (greens), eggplants, cabbage, carrots, onions and tomatoes, among others.

"Our farming programme has not spared the verandahs either, since we utilise every available space. As a result, teachers and pupils share the vegetable harvests to supplement their diet," she said.

The school's farming project is supported by the Agency for Integrated Rural Development (AFIRD), a non-government organisation. AFIRD has supported schools and farmers on effective and sustainable land use and environmental management for the last two decades in Uganda.

According to Nantumbwe, permaculture uses systems similar to organic gardening.

"In organic farming, farmers depend on self-sustaining methods to produce food. However, permaculture goes beyond just food production to the environment in the house and other structures at home or in a school," Eustace Ssajabbi, the executive director of AFIRD, explained.

School takes classroom to garden

"Parents come to study from our gardens with support of trained teachers." Nantumbwe

"AFIRD started by sensitising both teachers and pupils on modern agricultural practices. We organised ourselves into the department heads from the heads of the schools, pupils and staff and started off," Nantumbwe said.

She added they were taught how to utilise refuse to improve soil fertility. According to Nantumbwe, the programme attracted many pupils, who are transferring the skills to their communities. She also noted that the school's enrolment has increased from 400 pupils to 550 in a period of a year, as a result.

"We have had parents coming to study from our gardens with support of trained teachers," she said.

Ronald Kafeero, a P6 pupil at the school, is a prefect in charge of permaculture. He says he has taken the knowledge and skills learnt to his garden at home.

"I have a garden of onions and rear rabbits," he says.

According to Milly Nasaka, a parent at the school, her benefits from the project are invaluable. "I have learnt how to grow carrots and bananas from the school gardens. The crops are now my source of income," she says.

The Wakiso district LC5 vice-chairperson, Betty Naluyima, said the



St Theresa Mende Primary School pupils working in their permaculture garden. Photos by Nelson Kiva

non-utilised chunks of land on most of the public schools (both primary and secondary) in the district were a waste and unacceptable.

"Use it to implement modern agricultural programmes to the benefit of our communities," she said.

Naluyima was accompanied by area leaders at a public function hosted St Theresa Mende Primary School over the weekend.

AFIRD marked 20 years of celebrating its achievement in different communities in Wakiso, Mpigi and Mukono district on Thursday.

The celebrations coincided with an exhibition by the farmers and schools supported by AFIRD to, among others, attract other community members

and schools to adopt simple, but productive agriculture.

Some of the exhibiting schools included St Theresa Mende, Kalema Primary School, Child-to-Child Primary School, Sentema Public School, St Joseph Kanziye and Kabaabi Primary School.

The assistant project manager of permaculture at AFIRD, Lydia Kagoya, said their was to promote integrated land use designs in schools through sustainable agriculture.

The secretary for education and health in Wakiso district, Nakitende Beseyiwa, said: "Our children will get what to eat at school, learn and love agriculture. As a district, we shall encourage all the schools to take on

the programme."

Ssajabbi said permaculture is so far running in nine schools, but targeting 12 in the sub-counties of Mende, Gomba, Masulita, Namayumba and Kakiri.

"Practical learning by pupils has been enhanced through garden demonstrations at schools, skills and knowledge have been transferred to the community by pupils, thus a change in attitude by parents, who once viewed farming by their children as a punishment," he said.

Ssajabbi said over 3,500 pupils have so far benefited from AFIRD in just a period of one year since they embarked on the permaculture programme.