

SSEMWANGA WHO ONCE COULD NOT AFFORD FEES NOW RUNS A SCHOOL

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to Sister Elizabeth. These friendships became very important in shaping his future vision.

THE DREAM TO BUILD A SCHOOL

As he advanced in education, Ssemwanga never forgot the struggles he had gone through as a village child.

He constantly reflected on the challenges rural learners faced — poor schools, lack of opportunities and limited exposure.

"I suffered while studying and I told myself that one day, I would build a school in the village, not in town," Ssemwanga explains.

He shared his dream with some of the German friends connected to Sister Elizabeth. They believed in him and started supporting him slowly as he purchased land and established the first school structures.

Unlike many people who wait for a huge capital base before starting, Ssemwanga began modestly. In 2018, he officially opened Cornerstone Daycare Nursery and Primary School, starting with Baby Class up to Primary Three.

The school enrolled 145 pupils during its first year.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Geoffrey Ssemwanga's projects have significantly impacted Kassanda district. The school and hospital employ many local residents, whilst farmers and traders supply food and other products regularly.

Land prices in the surrounding areas have also increased because of growing development. Parents who previously transported children over

long distances for quality education now access good schools closer to home.

Ssemwanga says constructing houses for workers has helped improve stability, teamwork and efficiency in his projects. Employees who stay near their workplaces report on time and work comfortably without the stress of travelling long distances every day.

Today, the school has grown to more than 600 learners.

BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY

One principle of self-sustainability guided Ssemwanga from the start. Even when some of his foreign supporters offered to continue paying workers and teachers, he refused.

During the first term alone, the school generated a profit of about sh4.5m after paying teachers and operational expenses.

That success strengthened his confidence. The same year, Ssemwanga married his wife, marking another important chapter in his personal life. Although he had trained in clinical medicine, Ssemwanga realised that running a school required a deeper

understanding of education systems. Instead of assuming he knew enough, he returned to university and pursued a diploma in biology and chemistry.

"I wanted to understand education properly because I believed leadership requires knowledge," Ssemwanga says. That willingness to continue learning remains one of his strongest qualities.

COVID-19 AS AN OPPORTUNITY

When COVID-19 forced schools to close, many private institutions collapsed financially. For Ssemwanga, the lockdown period became an unexpected opportunity. Teachers who had nowhere to go remained at the school's premises.

Fortunately, he owned

land with clay soil and swampy areas suitable for brickmaking.

Together, Ssemwanga and the teachers started making bricks while consuming the food supplies that had remained at school after the sudden closure.

During that period, they produced nearly 120,000 bricks. Those bricks later became the building blocks of another dream — a hospital.

WHY HE STARTED A HOSPITAL

Ssemwanga had always had a passion for medicine because of his clinical training. As schools remained closed during the coronavirus pandemic, he contacted his supporters and proposed starting a hospital, since health facilities were still

operational.

"They asked me what I needed and I told them I wanted cement to begin constructing a hospital," Ssemwanga says.

That marked the birth of Red Rose Medical Hospital in Jemba village.

The health facility gradually expanded. Today, it employs doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, pharmacists and other medical workers.

In 2023, Ssemwanga realised the hospital had become self-sustaining.

"That was the turning point, when I understood the hospital could stand on its own," he says.

FEAR OF LOANS, SLOW GROWTH

Unlike many businessmen who rely heavily on loans, Ssemwanga prefers gradual growth. Growing up, he watched people lose property after failing to repay loans. That experience created a deep fear of borrowing in him.

"I prefer building slowly, using profits instead of rushing and risking collapse," he says.

Today, the school, hospital and farm operate with separate accounts to avoid financial confusion. Each project supports itself independently. This system has helped him maintain stability even during difficult periods.

UNIQUE SCHOOL OFFERINGS

Geoffrey Ssemwanga believes his school, Cornerstone Daycare Nursery and Primary School, stands out because it focuses on holistic education.

Besides academic learning, learners receive skills training in various fields. The school teaches computer skills from the nursery level to prepare children for the digital world.

Learners also participate in sewing, agriculture, sports and other activities.

"I do not wait to leave school to learn practical life skills," Ssemwanga explains.

Children learn to repair simple household items, bake snacks and participate in projects such as coffee growing and preparation for farming. The school invests heavily in development of various sports.

Every year, the school plans educational trips outside to broaden children's understanding of the world. Ssemwanga says the experience helps learners gain confidence and creativity.

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