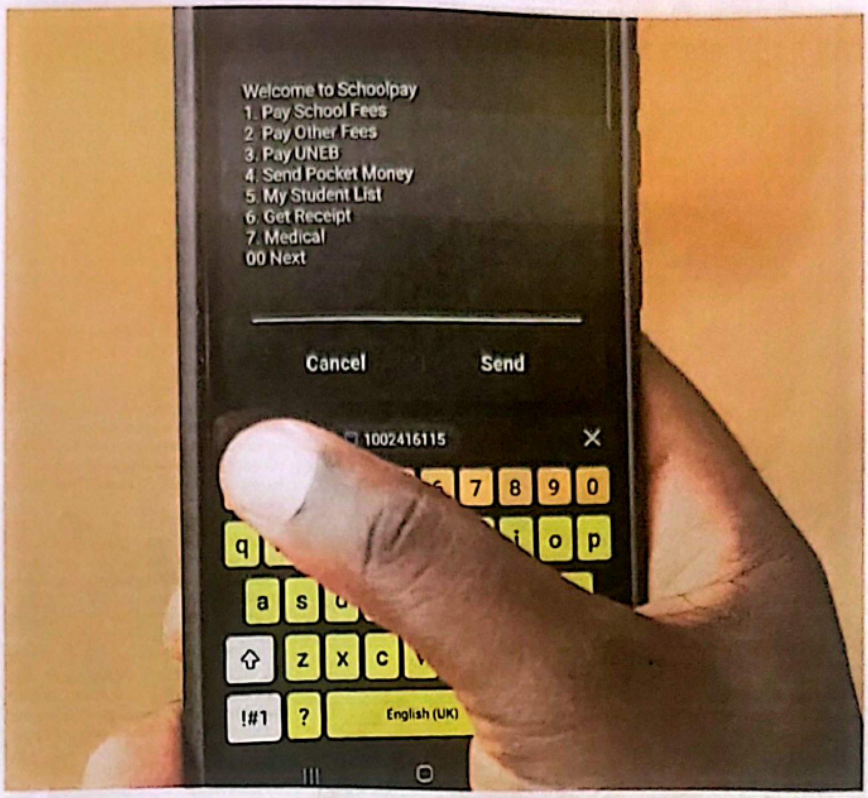
Goodbye long queues

DIGITAL PAYMENTS

INTERVIEW
DOROTHY NAKAWEESI

10 years later, SchoolPay ends long banking queues



A person using the school pay method to pay for school fees. People no longer lineup in banks to clear their children's school fees. PHOTO/MICHAEL KAKUMIRIZI

Not so long ago, the beginning of every school term came with a familiar ritual: endless queues snaking outside bank halls, parents clutching deposit slips. Others crowded the corridors of head teachers' offices, waiting patiently for that small but powerful piece of paper – a handwritten chit permitting their child to step into class while school fees were paid in instalments. *BD Life* caught up with Charity Atukwatsa Mutagamba, the chief executive officer of Fincom Technologies, the firm behind SchoolPay digital. Below are the excerpts:-

Give us a brief overview of SchoolPay.

Over the past decade, SchoolPay has steadily grown to simplify the lives of millions of parents, students, and schools across Africa. This reflects our commitment to improving lives through universal financial inclusion. As FinCom Technologies, through SchoolPay platform, one of our creations, we deliver a digital lending solution for schools in the country. Currently, SchoolPay serves more than 15,000 schools and processes over half of all private-sector tuition payments in Uganda.

Through this integration, Stanbic Bank becomes the first financial institution to embed credit functionality into the platform. SchoolPay Uganda is a secure and convenient digital school fees payment platform and school management solution that enables parents to pay fees anytime, anywhere — without the stress of cash handling. Designed for today's schools, it offers real-time payment tracking and automated reconciliation, improving transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Over the years, SchoolPay has evolved to offer value-added services that support the education ecosystem. These include school financing to provide institutions with access to credit for sustainable growth, SchoolPay Savings to help parents plan and save for school fees, and S-Wallet, a digital pocket money solution that allows students to receive and manage funds safely and conveniently.

What is your experience with digital payment solutions in the education sector, and how does Schoolpay address the unique challenges of school fee payments?

Digital payments in education tackle cash handling risks, inefficiencies, poor record-keeping, and access barriers (especially in rural areas). SchoolPay specifically solves these by enabling instant, cashless payments from anywhere, real-time tracking, reduced revenue leakage (for example, one reported case of a school cutting 40 percent losses and boosting revenue 50 percent after adoption), and digitising operations to improve data management, attendance, and reporting. It eases burdens on parents (no need to travel with cash), schools (better financial visibility and savings), and students (fewer disruptions from fee delays).

How does Schoolpay ensure security and convenience for parents making payments, and what measures are in place to prevent transaction errors?

Convenience comes from multiple channels: Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) on MTN or Airtel for quick steps, mobile app, website (schoolpay.co.ug), mobile banking, bank branches/agents, and WhatsApp, all allowing payments anytime without queues.

We are regulated by Bank of Uganda and have integration with trusted telecoms/banks and safeguards like limited access to data.

To prevent errors, parents use unique student payment codes (10-digit), get confirmation notifications before entering their mobile money pins plus instant confirmations. In case of errors, they can call the support (helpline 0200 502 140 for our team to handle issues quickly.

Partner

'Schools are required to hold an account with one of our partner banks. We currently partner with more than 23 banks across the country — covering almost all major banks.'

Any feedback from schools or parents using Schoolpay in Uganda?

The adoption of digital payments has transformed the education ecosystem: Centenary Bank reports over 80 percent of school fees collections via SchoolPay versus traditional methods. Early user Seeta High School helped prove the model, leading to growth to thousands of institutions.

Parents appreciate eliminating cash risks and queues; schools report better revenue control. Partnerships with banks like Stanbic/United Nation Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) projects in Northern Uganda/Kiryandongo) extended reach to underserved areas, improving access and enabling features like savings/loans.

This highlights happiness from parents and schools after initial skepticism, with impacts like ensuring children don't miss school due to payment hassles.

How does Schoolpay integrate with existing school management systems, and what's the onboarding process like for new schools?

SchoolPay offers a fully-fledged ERP (school management system) with open Application Programming Interface (API) for integrations, supporting real-time data sync (for example payments, student information).

It connects to external systems via APIs and includes its own modules for attendance, academics, finance, to mention but a few.

In terms of on boarding, schools are required to hold an account with one of our partner banks. We currently partner with more than 23 banks across the country — covering almost all major banks.

Our relationship managers collect data which can also be compiled by the school. This involves school details such as school name, students bio, location and badge among others.

What is the growth plan for Schoolpay in Uganda, and how do you see the app evolving to meet the needs of schools and parents?

As SchoolPay marks 10 years this year on May 1, we continue to expand in Uganda and Africa, with recent upgrades to its Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), financing solutions for schools, savings schemes for parents, for example, more touchpoints which are more than 33 currently. Future evolution for Fincom includes deeper fintech integrations such as more financing options, broader rural reach for all the schools to adopt and advanced analytics. We aim to further digitise education across Uganda and the African continent at large.