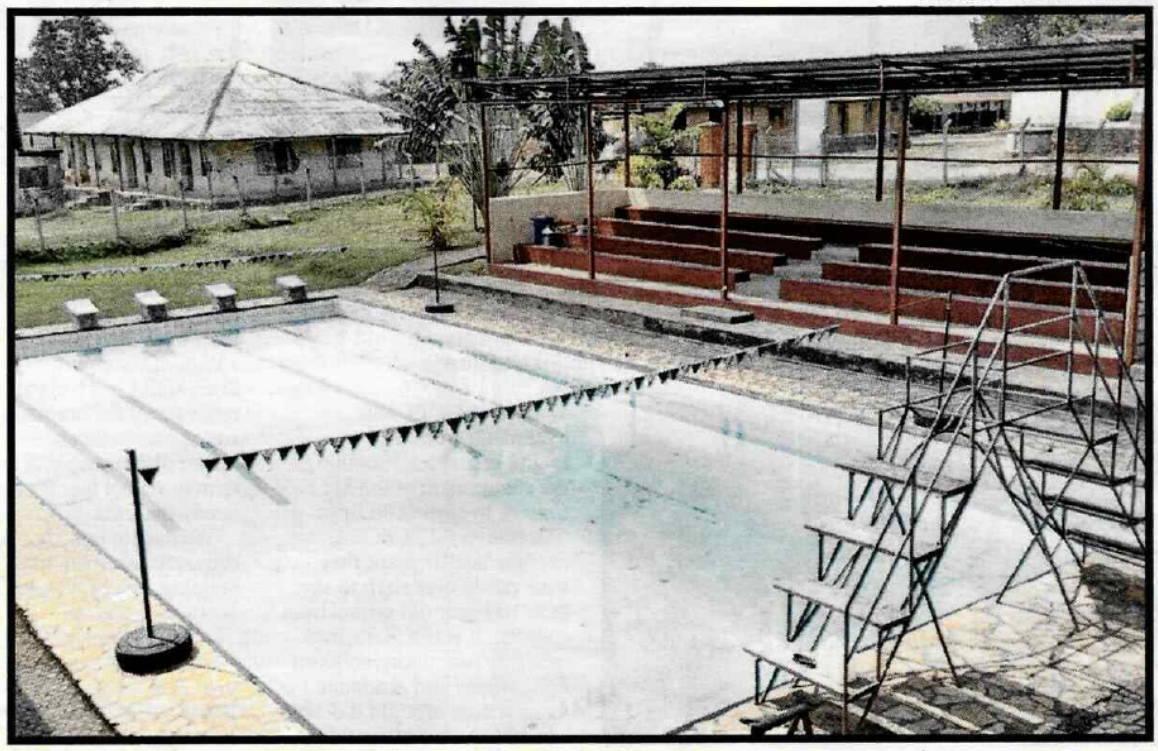
NNALIMU

PHOTOS BY RITAH MUKASA



Old students of Nabumali High School raised sh280m to renovate the institution's swimming pool. Of late, alumni of traditional schools have stepped up efforts to revive the glory of their alma mater

Old students take charge

Across Uganda, old students of traditional schools are investing billions to rescue their alma mater from the brink of collapse. **RITAH MUKASA** traces how the alumni raise the funds.

Alumni associations lead revival of traditional schools

Busoga College Mwiri needs no introduction when it comes to secondary schools that have bred influential leaders and professionals since its inception in 1911. It was a dream school for many.

So great that its motto; *Kulwa Katonda n'gwanga Lyaffe,"* loosely meaning "For God and Our country" it is said, influenced the national motto "For God and My Country".

However, by the mid-2000s, the school had become a shadow of its former self. The dormitories and classrooms looked dilapidated. The enrolment also dropped sharply because of decline in academics.

And in 2013, as Mwiri was celebrating 100 years, there was a students' strike, yet the school was grappling with sh1b debt. If it wasn't for the old boys' intervention, this great school would be history. Rodney Henry Mugisha, the publicity secretary of Mwiri Old boys Association (MOBA), says the college is in a better place now.

"We took over leadership of the board of governors. Former prime minister Dr Ruhakana Rugunda is our Patron. We have over 16,000 alumni in 40 groups," he says.

They pool resources through social media groups, Mwiri Football League and fundraising events. MOBA combines both Mwiri Primary School and college old boys.

What's more, they also raise millions from the sale of memorabilia, alumni subscription and life membership. Each member pays sh50,000 annually and life membership is at sh1m.

Mugisha says, more money comes in from the Government and the alumni chapters across the world.

"Our sweat is paying off," he says. The school enrolment has risen from 500 to over 1,000 and all the debts have been cleared. They have also built a main gate, renovated the sports facilities and staff quarters. Most of the asbestos roofs have been replaced. The dormitories, chapel, dining hall and classes have been given a face lift as well.

Next, MOBA is pooling resources to construct a modern swimming pool.

"We are keen on accountability," Mugisha says. Money is deposited on the MOBA account and members are given accountability.

TORORO

In Tororo district, St Peter's College Tororo, established in 1941 has also been struggling for many years. Its performance and infrastructure deteriorated significantly, but the St Peter's College Tororo Old Boys Association (SPECTOBA) has embarked on a fundraising campaign, targeting sh3b to revive the school. Aside from the fundraising dinners, Andrew Onapito a communication specialist, says: "We also organise sporting activities targeting older alumni from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s."

SPECTOBA has also established the Bernard Onyango Scholarship Fund in partnership with the family of the late Bernard Onyango, a former educationist.

NABUMALI SHINING AGAIN

From its inception in 1912 up to 1975, Nabumali High School was among the top secondary schools in the country. Sitting on 100 acres in Mbale district, the school had over 1,500 students, an Olympic size swimming pool, modern laboratories and sports facilities. It also produced hockey and basketball stars, Collins Wasswa Matovu, patron of the Nabumali Old students Association (NOSA), says.

In 1977, however, the school started to deteriorate. By 2017, the enrolment had dropped to 400 due to poor management and academic decline.

In 1985, Matovu says NOSA was formed to revive the school, but with minimal impact. They kept pushing, until June 2017 when they pooled sh280m to rehabilitate the swimming pool, which had been closed for 41 years.

This milestone motivated more alumni to join and since then, they have completed 12 multi-billion infrastructure projects. They also run a four year bursary scheme for 12 needy students in O'level.

"We prioritise accountability. In 2020, we fired the headteacher, his deputy and bursar for mismanaging funds," Matovu says.

On how they raise the funds, he says, they have six houses; Aggrey, Apollo, Banks, Crabtree, Hannington and Tomusange, each with an average of 200 registered members. For most projects, members contribute.

What they raise from the annual dinner goes to the asbestos roofs replacement. But also, alumni do fundraising competitions coupled with sh6m contribution by each house to the bursary scheme.

More money comes in from subscriptions; an ordinary member pays sh100,000, life membership ordinary is at sh2.5m, gold is sh5m and platinum is at sh10m. The technical alumni offer pro bono services. After many years, the school regained its position as the best in the 2025 Uganda Certificate of Education examinations.

KABALEGA SS

In Masindi district, the Kabalega Secondary School Old Boys Association (KASSOBA) has invested millions in the restoration of the

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