

Let's save children from drowning

As Uganda joined the rest of the world in commemorating World Children's Day on Thursday, November 20, my mind was taken back to the demise of Peter Kirwana, who drowned in a school swimming pool at St Mary's College Kisubi, Wakiso District, last month.

Sadly, even with the continuous loss of lives, the government and development partners still underrate drowning.

Lest we forget, drowning is the process of experiencing respiratory impairment due to submersion or immersion in a liquid, typically water, leading to difficulty in breathing and potential death.

According to a World Health Organisation (WHO) 2024 report, "it is estimated that more than 300,000 people died due to drowning, and most deaths, at 92 percent, occur in low- and middle-income countries".

In Uganda, statistics from a recent study by Makerere University School of Public Health State say about 3,000 Ugandans die annually, making it about nine cases per day, with children and young adults between five and 25 years being the most vulnerable.

The unfortunate case of Kirwana reminded me of my nephew, who died under similar circumstances. Frank Kayondo, aged nine years, had sneaked from home to go and play, only to be discovered a few hours later when he got stuck in a muddy pond and vertically submerged and drowned.

The unrecorded death of my nephew adds to the statistics of drowning happening in places such swimming pools and even floods.

A few days ago, a three-year-old boy drowned in a water pit as his parents were

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Robert Kigongo

Drowning



attending a Sacco meeting in Luuka District. In 2024, a child aged 10 was washed away by floods in Bwaise, Kampala. In May 2019, former minister Ronald Kibuule lost his twins in a home swimming pool.

Unfortunately, such cases are happening frequently around the country, with many going unreported.

Such cases are attributed to a lack of life

jackets in communities, floods, the absence of basic swimming skills, parental negligence, and community awareness about the dangers of unsafe swimming.

Dear parents, teachers, political and community leaders, as we celebrate Children's Day, it's our responsibility to protect our young ones from drowning.

It is the cardinal duty of parents and guardians to always ensure the supervision of children whenever they are around water bodies.

Local governments, civil society and community-based organisations should ensure swimming lessons are extended to the children.

The authorities should install barriers as essential to controlling access to unsafe water sources such as ponds, swamps, lakes and rivers to ensure children's safety. They should also provide safe spaces away from water for pre-school children as an addition to child care and protection from disasters.

They should also train community stewards in safe rescue and resuscitation through the introduction of community swim programmes at the grassroots.

Since most cases of drowning happen in lake districts, setting and enforcing safe boating and ferry regulations is equally important to drowning prevention.

World Children's Day is a stark reminder for everyone to promote awareness against drowning.

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