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Kyeyo workers lose billions to relatives Publish Date: Apr 02, 2013



Many Ugandans on kyeyo work hard only for their money to be swindled by cunning relatives
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What do you do when your money earned through the sweat and endless hours of harsh weather and employment conditions, is swindled by someone you thought you could trust? That is the plight of the **nkuba kyeyo**, as [Charles Etukuri](#) found out

Namisango's story

When Anita Namisango graduated from Makerere University in the early 1990s, she thought getting a job would be easy. But the pain of being jobless after graduation, with no lunch and no rent, made her succumb to the allure of trying her luck abroad in search of greener pastures.

"I had seen so many of my relatives travel abroad and become millionaires overnight by just cleaning toilets and doing other odd jobs. Some of them were not even well educated, but had put up mansions," she says.

Just like the other Ugandans, she saw fortune when she got an opportunity to travel to the UK. But her joy was short-lived when she landed in the UK.

"That was when I came face to face with the hard realities of life. I came across men and women who live miserable lives," she says. To her, life back home was better, but since she had made her parents sell some of their properties to facilitate her travel to the UK, she was not ready to return and be ridiculed as a failure.

"I did all sorts of jobs and started off with working as a laundry assistant, worked in a warehouse as records assistant, packed fruits and vegetables, worked in elderly homes escorting the sickly to toilets and sometimes cleaned those who messed themselves up," she says.

“Some of these jobs were undoable and unwanted by the whites and they left them to us the blacks,” she adds.

Faced with extreme poverty and starvation back home, the fear of hunger and being regarded as a failure became her main motivation. Namisango battled the chilling London winters, loneliness and racism to save money and better her life back home, working up to sixteen hours a day.

“From day one, there were many others looking for jobs and waiting for me to be sacked, so that they could replace me,” she adds. Back home, whenever her parents called to ask her what she was doing, she kept on telling them she was working in a busy State office.



Police chief Kale Kayihura visits a murder scene. The Police say some murders are linked to kyeyo money.

After six months, she called a relative and asked him to get her a plot of land.

“He identified a piece of land in Ntinda and sent me the photos. Impressed, she asked another relative to go and check out the details and indeed she also confirmed that the land existed.

“I sent the money they wanted and they even scanned the receipts and sent them to me indicating they had paid for the land, ” she says.

Five months later, Namisango decided it was time to start building. She sent her building plans to the same relatives and money to start the constructions. They kept on sending photos showing the progress of the house step by step.

“It was a huge two-storied mansion, and perfectly suited for what I had always longed for,” Namisango says.

Eventually, the photos of the finished house were sent to her. They then identified land along Bwebajja on Entebbe Road and told her to invest in apartments. She sent them money trusting that her relatives were investing in the said land.

They even asked her for money for a farm at her ancestral home in Sembabule and fully stocked it for her with both local and exotic cows.

Returning home

After a four-year stint in the UK, Namisango decided to come home for a holiday and inspect

some of her developments.

“I left a pauper and here I was returning as a proud landlord,” she kept on telling herself.

But when she arrived at the airport, there was nobody to receive her. She boarded a cab and drove straight to Ntinda where her supposed house had been built.

“They had sent me the address, so I found no difficulty in locating the house. The special hire driver took me up to the residence and hooted. A guard quickly opened the gate for her. To my bewilderment, the house was occupied,” she says.

Beaming with confidence, she asked the occupants of the house who they were. The answer she got was even more shocking.

She was asked who she was and the person she wanted to see. Namisango introduced herself as the owner of the house. But as luck would have it, the real owner of the home was around.

“The maid called the owner and when he came around, he shocked me when he told me he was the actual owner of the property and ordered me out of the house,” Namisango says.

Police was called in immediately and Namisango was bundled and taken to Kiira Road Police station where a case of trespass was recorded. She later learnt that all the money she had been remitting for development projects had been swindled by people she trusted.

The relatives had posed in front of a house that was being constructed in Ntinda and the apartments along Entebbe Road and sent the photos to her. They had also taken photos of a farm with several herds of cattle and sent it to her in the pretext that she owned them.

The soldier's tale

But the saddest tale is that of a Ugandan soldier Lance Corporal Rwakihembo, who is currently serving a 35-year sentence in Luzira Maximum Prison for manslaughter.

Rwakihembo and the other soldiers were sent to Somalia to battle the al-Shabaab militia and were being paid handsomely by the African Union Mission. Before he left, he abandoned his wife, a mother of two, and found a new girlfriend. His new lover kept on communicating with him.

One day, as they were chatting about their future plans, Rwakihembo's girlfriend told him about her plans to invest in a shop and a salon.

She also wanted money to invest in a piggery project and had identified a suitable piece of land in Mukono. Convinced that his girlfriend was serious, Rwakihembo started sending money and even authorised her to withdraw the little savings he had in the bank.

“She kept on sending me pictures of a fully stocked salon, shop and a piggery farm and convinced me that the projects were doing so well and I sent more money to her,” says Rwakihembo.

But as fate would have it, when time for his mission in Somalia was over, Rwakihembo and the others returned to their respective stations.

It was time for him to pay a visit and inspect some of the investments. “When I called her and told her I was coming, she was not as happy as she had been,” he says.

Even when he landed and reported to Luzira Prison where he was attached, she kept on dodging him claiming she had travelled to the village to see her relatives. He then decided to pay a visit to her shop. He was shocked by the empty shelves and a counter he found.

“When I pressed her hard to explain, she told me not to disturb her. She even told me that the child I was claiming was not even mine,” Rwakihembo adds.

The other women in the shop joined her in ridiculing the soldier.

Unable to withstand the scorn, Rwakihembo rushed to his work station and returned only to find the woman's lover coming out of the shop.

The man then joined the women in teasing him and told him the gun he was carrying was a government weapon. Humiliated, Rwakihembo opened fire, killing the three women on the spot while injuring the man. He then fled back to his station.

Figures involved

Even though statistics from Bank of Uganda indicate that remittances from Ugandans abroad surpassed traditional foreign earners like tourism, in 2011, *Sunday Vision* can exclusively reveal that several Ugandans working in the diaspora have been conned of their hard-earned money by people they trusted to invest some of these moneys on their behalf.

The World Bank publication titled “Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011, Ugandans abroad remitted over sh1.7 trillion), which was up from \$694m (sh1.56 trillion, the previous year.

This was higher than the traditional foreign exchange earners.

For instance, in the same period, tourism fetched \$400m (sh900b), coffee fetched \$269m (sh605b) and fish \$143.53m (sh323b). The fact book which tracks documented private transfers of funds and migratory patterns around the world, noted that Uganda was among the top 10 remittance, recipients in Africa.

“The fact that remittances are so large, come in foreign currency and go directly to households means that these transfers have a significant impact on poverty reduction, funding for housing and education, basic essential needs and even business investments,” Dilip Ratha, the manager of the migration and remittances unit at the World Bank, said.



The Rakai ordeal where a family of nine was killed is thought to be linked to kyeyo money

Broken trust

There are Ugandans who have gone for kyeyo and turned out to be successful businessmen and women. Some of the most successful businessmen who made it big during the early 1980s in Japan include Hajji Burahimu Muwanga Kibirige (BMK), the proprietor of Hotel Africana and Haruna Ssemakula of the defunct General Parts Uganda.

At the height of the Kyeyo business, these came back and helped develop trading centres like Ndeeba, Kisekka market and Katwe auto parts shops from their sweat. According to Kibirige, people were reliable at the time.

You could send items from Japan to people you could trust and they would handle their sales well. The local traders also built trust.

In the early 2000, the Government officially recognised the foreign remittances flow to the country as private capital and as a leading earner and steadier source of foreign exchange earnings.

But most of the Ugandans who send in their money end up losing their investments to unscrupulous relations, who regard them as cash cows.

Several Ugandans in the diaspora shared stories of how their relatives and those they trusted had conned them. It is difficult to compute the exact amount of monies stolen from kyeyo workers as many of them do not report to Police.

However, it is estimated to be in billions.

A Police source says in some of the cases, the victims have resorted to murdering to either shut up their victims or revenge.

The Police confirm that they are investigating a number of murders that are thought to be linked to money stolen from kyeyo workers by their contact persons in Uganda.

Some of the murders are allegedly orchestrated by returning kyeyo workers upon discovering that their hard-earned cash has been stolen. Others are by those who swindled the money and are fearing to be pursued by the owner.

Police calls for caution

Last year, 75-year-old Sarah Nanziri, who had just returned from London to celebrate Christmas, was murdered by suspected relatives in what investigators believe was a case where they feared she would report them after she found her money had been swindled.

Police is also following up a clue, that the nine family members who were murdered in Rakai could have been killed after a nkuba kyeyo decided to send money directly to a pastor to invest instead of a relative who had been receiving money and diverting it.

In an interview with *Sunday Vision*, Kampala Extra Police spokesperson Ibin Senkumbi, said the Police received so many cases of people who had been conned by their relatives. "It is always prudent to be cautious when you venture out to trust individuals who are relatives," he says.




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