

## Planting Hope: A Community's Dream for Junior Primary School

In the heart of Kapiri Zone, nestled within the rural district of Mchinji, stands Mikonga Junior Primary School a modest but determined institution with only Standard 1 and 3 classes. Though still in its early stages, this school represents more than just a place of learning it symbolizes a community's unwavering belief in the power of education.

From the very beginning, the local community has rallied behind the school, offering support, encouragement, and a shared vision; to see it grow into a fully developed primary school that will serve generations to come. The school may be small, but the dreams surrounding it are vast.

Recognizing this potential, Girls Activist Youth Organisation (GAYO) under the *Tikwanilitse ndikuteteza Ma Ufuku a Ana* TiKuMA Project stepped in to nurture not just education, but the environment. During its implementation, the project identified a pressing need the school stood on bare land, exposed to the elements, with no trees to offer shade, beauty, or sustainability.

In response, TiKuMA project provided 100 tree seedlings, a gift that sparked joy and hope throughout the school and its surrounding community. These weren't just trees they were symbols of growth, resilience, and a greener future. Together, the school staff, committee structures, and community members came together to plant each seedling with care and pride, envisioning a thriving woodlot that would one day shelter and sustain their beloved school.

This is not just a story about planting trees it's a story about planting dreams, and the power of community to transform a humble beginning into a flourishing legacy.

As the tree planting initiative took root, the Head Teacher of Mikonga Junior Primary School shared a heartfelt reflection on the community's extraordinary commitment

***"When the trees were planted, the community didn't stop there. They took it upon themselves to ensure the seedlings had enough water. Every day, they fetch water from the community borehole and pour it onto the trees. It's a labor of love."***

Since the school's establishment, it has never had a water source on its premises. The school relies entirely on the generosity of the surrounding community especially the mothers who wake up early each morning to fetch water and fill the school's buckets. Now, that same water is being shared with the trees, a gesture that speaks volumes about the community's dedication to both education and environmental sustainability.

However, the challenge remains steep. Despite these efforts, only 47 out of the 100 seedlings survived. The lack of a nearby water source means that when the community cannot provide enough water, the trees go without. And for young seedlings, consistent watering is essential for survival and healthy growth.

***“It’s a huge problem,” the Head Teacher admitted. “These trees are still small and fragile. Without enough water, they struggle to grow. We are doing our best, but we need more support.”***

When it became clear that only 47 out of the original 100 trees had survived, the school leadership and its dedicated committee didn’t sit back in defeat. They convened a meeting with the community to discuss how to respond. Together, they reached a powerful decision: to contribute whatever they could time, money, and effort to restore what had been lost.

Through collective fundraising and community contributions, the school successfully procured 55 new tree seedlings, which were carefully planted around the school grounds. Thanks to the lessons learned and the community’s continued care, these new trees are thriving, bringing renewed hope and greenery to the once bare landscape.



But just as the trees began to flourish, a new obstacle emerged the community’s borehole the only nearby water source broke down. Now, both the school and the community must travel to the nearest village, which is far from the school, just to fetch water. This has placed an enormous strain on everyone, especially the mothers who carry the burden of water collection.

The school is now appealing to well-wishers, development partners, and anyone willing to help. Their plea is simple but urgent

***“We need a reliable water source on our campus. Whether it’s repairing the damaged borehole, constructing a water reservoir, or installing a rope-and-washer pump any solution that brings water closer to our school will make a world of difference.”***

Water is not just essential for the trees it’s vital for the students, the teachers, and the future of this growing school. With support, Junior Primary School can continue to blossom both in education and in environment.

Eslina Kachingwe, Chair of the School Management Committee, echoed the head teacher’s concerns and hopes. She praised the TiKuMA Project, led by Girls Activist Youth Organisation (GAYO), for giving their school the opportunity to establish a small woodlot a gift that has sparked pride and purpose within the community.



Understanding the vulnerability of young trees, the committee took proactive steps to protect the seedlings from grazing animals. They carefully covered each tree with Napier grass stems, creating a natural barrier against goats and other livestock that might feed on them. This simple but thoughtful act reflects the community's deep commitment to nurturing the trees and safeguarding their future.

But Eslina's vision goes beyond trees. She shared the committee plans to build a classroom block and erect a fence around the school, ensuring that both the children and the trees are safe. A fence would not only protect the school grounds from animals but also create a secure learning environment for the students.

Still, her greatest concern remains the same as the head teacher's

***"How will the school function without water? Water is life not just for our learners and teachers, but for the trees we've planted. Without water, how will they survive and grow?"***

With no water source on campus, the school depends entirely on the community's effort to fetch water from distant villages. This burden falls heavily on mothers and other community members who rise early to ensure the trees are watered and the school has enough for daily use.

Eslina's message is clear and heartfelt

***"We need help. A repaired borehole, a new water reservoir, or any sustainable water solution would transform our school. It would mean healthier trees, better learning conditions, and a future where our children and environment flourish together."***

The Senior Chief of the area also voiced his deep appreciation for the support provided by GAYO under the TiKuMA Project, recognizing the value of the tree seedlings and the vision they represent for the school and the community. He extended his gratitude to the School Management Committee and the head teacher for their tireless efforts to ensure the trees are watered and the school remains functional despite the lack of a nearby water source.

Years ago, Pump Aid installed a rope-and-washer pump in the area, long before the school was established. Unfortunately, the pump was later damaged, and no follow-up was made to address the issue, even though it was known that the underground water lies deep beneath the surface. This unresolved challenge has left the school and community struggling to meet basic water needs.

Now, the Senior Chief is making a heartfelt appeal to well-wishers, stakeholders, government bodies, and non-governmental organizations

***“This school cannot advance without water. The trees gifted by GAYO and those purchased by the school will not survive without consistent watering. The purpose and impact of this initiative will be lost. Moreover, the lack of water is delaying our plans to construct a new classroom block that would allow us to expand from Standards 1 and 3 to include Standards 4 and 5.”***

Water is not just a necessity it is the foundation for growth, learning, and sustainability. Without it, the dreams of a greener, fuller, and more inclusive school remain out of reach. The community has done its part. Now, they are calling on others to help turn this vision into reality.

The story of Mikonga Junior Primary School in Kapiri Zone is not just about education it’s about resilience, unity, and the power of community-driven change. From a humble beginning with only two classrooms, this school has become a symbol of what can be achieved when people come together with a shared vision.

Thanks to the TiKuMA Project and the support of GAYO, the school was gifted the opportunity to grow a woodlot an initiative that sparked environmental awareness, community pride, and a renewed commitment to the school’s future. Despite the harsh realities of water scarcity, the community has shown extraordinary dedication fetching water daily, protecting young trees with Napier grass, and even raising funds to replace lost seedlings.

Yet, the journey is far from over. The broken borehole and lack of a reliable water source threaten not only the survival of the trees but the very foundation of the school’s growth. Without water, the vision of expanding to include more classes, creating a safe and green learning environment, and empowering future generations hangs in the balance.

This is a story of hope planted in dry soil and with the right support, it can flourish. The community has done its part. Now, it’s time for well-wishers, stakeholders, and development partners to step in and help turn this dream into a lasting reality.



Because when you water a seed, you don’t just grow a tree you grow a future.

**Written By:** Travis Stonken (*Communications Officer*)