



EDUCATION



■ Relic of science lab at GJSS, (Boys), Barnawa

Photo: Shehu Goro

Gov't mum as soccer trainees, vandals wreck school facilities in Kaduna

From Hassan Ibrahim, Kaduna

Regardless of the fact that huge sums of money are spent on the establishment and upkeep of public schools, children still learn in run-down classrooms, where teaching shouldn't ordinarily hold.

By all accounts, there are countless determinants to the wear and tear of school buildings such as aging and poor maintenance but in Kaduna metropolitan area, the activities of vandals and even football players and enthusiasts have reportedly contributed to the deterioration of dozens of blocks of classrooms.

Youth from host communities have unfettered access to basic and secondary schools after school hours where they train in soccer on students' pitches mostly situated near classrooms. Balls constantly hit and damage windows, walls and roofs while vandals who sneak in as spectators, destroy and pilfer school facilities, according to reliable sources.

The situation has to some extent worsened learning and teaching conditions of most of the affected schools because hundreds of pupils sit on the floor as result of destruction and theft of school furniture.

In Government Secondary School Barnawa (Boys), where youth from the community train on the pitch located next to classrooms, a science lab and a block of classrooms have been damaged; the lab had to be closed.

A teacher said the school premises has become porous following many illegal entrances created by the football trainees, making it difficult to maintain security and control them and also to effectively monitor the students movement.

The teacher said the activities of footballers and vandals have become a challenge beyond the control of school managements. Balls are continuously hitting the walls, smashing windows and caving in the corrugated iron sheet roofs, she said.

"They have completely damaged a whole classroom and after meeting with them under the leadership the district head they promised to rebuild the class and expand

the structure to become a school hall. Unfortunately they started but abandoned the work.

"One other worrisome problem is that the primary school pupils cannot open their windows which are directly facing the football pitch. We have written several reports and made verbal complaints about the menace of these footballers to the ministry without any positive response. The goalpost is placed close to our laboratory. They have damaged the roof, fittings, windows and doors.

"Let me tell you, an official in the ministry told me during one of my visits to complain about the menace that even if government renovates the school, the footballers will continue to wreck it.

They directed the school to continue to dialogue with the community. Several letters have been written to the Ministry of Education but no action has yet been taken to address the challenge," the teacher said.

One of the footballers in Barnawa, who gave his name as Garba said his colleagues are not happy with the situation as well, and that several meetings were held with the community leaders and the school on the way forward.

He said, "We cherish and love to see the school in good condition because it is an important structure liberating thousands of people because education will make the society a better place. We also want to keep on playing football in the community because it has produced many professional footballers apart from keeping fit."

In the LEA, Primary School, Kurmin Mashi, the roofs of most of the classrooms close to the soccer field are in bad condition mostly as a result of balls landing on them.

Also, many classes have no chairs and desks, leaving hundreds of pupils to sit on the floor while the teachers sit on mats.

A teacher in the school, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the footballers training in their pitch are threatening the existence of the school because, "apart from damaging the buildings, they disrupt school activities like morning lessons and routine school assembly.

"Despite reaching agreement with the

head teacher that whenever the school bell rang they should leave until school closed, the footballers train anytime of the day. They should be held responsible for damaging learning facilities."

She said the presence of the footballers has also paved way for hoodlums to perpetuate all manner of bad things within the school with impunity.

"They recently broke into the headmasters' office through the ceiling and carted away valuables. Almost all the classrooms have their roofs and ceilings wrecked. Some of them also defecate in the classrooms. So sometimes you come in the morning only to find that they have littered the environment with faeces or huge pile of sugarcane waste.

"They break furniture and later come back to steal the pieces. You also find some women and children picking the pieces of broken desks for firewood.

"The activities of these footballers have become unbearable because it seems that they are above the law. The school management doesn't have the power to stop them. The issues have been discussed in many PTA meetings but no any positive solution has been achieved," the head teacher said.

Another teacher in Kurmin Mashi said the only solution is involving district heads in the negotiations and for government to provide sufficient security personnel at schools. He said, "If you look at the damage caused by these footballers, there is a tendency that they will one day override the school activities."

The traditional chief of Kurmin Mashi, Alhaji Ahmad Muhammad said the matter must be handled with care. "Destruction of school facilities is a cause of concern, but football trainings have prevented thousands of unemployed youth from restiveness and unnecessary nuisance; he said.

He advised professional footballers from the state to establish football academies.

One of the amateur soccer teams' coach that trains in Unguwan Muazu LEA school, told DailyTrust that allegation of destruction of public school buildings and facilities has been a major concern to the teams, adding,

"the situation is disturbing us even more than the management of schools; we have met and discussed the way out because we need the schools as much as we like football."

Another coach, Umar Usman, popularly known as Coach Malam Toe, said local teams that train in public school grounds contribute money for the repair of damage caused by their activities.

He said: "80 to 90 percent of community footballers depend on public school fields to train. We have understanding with the management of LEA Primary School, Kibo Road and LEA Constitution Road and all the local teams training on the pitches have agreed to contribute money for the repair of damaged facilities, especially corrugated zinc and other parts of the roofs."

According to him, professional players who started from the community level also contribute funds to address some of the challenges. He said, "Whenever they come home, some of them contribute money which is mostly used in weeding the school fields."

Coach Toe explained that while community footballers and their fans destroyed school facilities inadvertently, the benefit of playing football, especially among teaming unemployed youth is clear. Apart from teaching teamwork, discipline and goal-setting, football prevents the youth from becoming easy recruits or tools of evil-minded people to cause problem in the society.

Commissioner for Education Science and Technology, Jafaru Sani, when contacted, asked for more time to speak on the matter but did not do so at the time of filling this report.

Ditto the Special Assistant to Governor Nasir el-Rufa'i on Media and Publicity, Samuel Aruwan, who declined to answer several calls and text message sent to his line.

Meanwhile, an analyst has said the authorities should frequently talk with the amateur soccer teams about caring for school property and that government must fulfill its responsibility of providing sports and recreation facilities in every neighborhood.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Anyone who criticizes you cares about your friendship. Anyone who makes light of your faults cares nothing about you - Ibn Hazm