

Street children raping residents in Namutumba

Challenge. Leaders say they lack funds to carry out legal action against street children.

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NAMUTUMBA. Namutumba District is grappling with street children who have become a menace as they are allegedly raping and impregnating residents.

According to the district probation officer, Ms Esther Nandase, besides engaging in robbery and consumption of illicit drugs, child to child sex cases among street children in the area has become rampant.

"We always receive complaints from residents that street children defiling and impregnating their daughters. We just caution them [street children] because we do not have money for legal procedures," Ms Nandase said.

She added: "We shall continue registering defilement and rape cases if no intervention is made because the biggest number of street children we have currently is sexually active."

Ms Nandase said street children dominate streets of Mbale-Tirinyi road, Iganga-Bugiri and Tororo-Busia highways.

Mr Kaune Wakooli, who owns a hardware shop in Bugiri Municipality, said government needs to intervene because street children openly steal from shops.

Ms Giff Namukasa, a food vendor on Kigobelo Road in Iganga Municipality, said despite their endless pleas and requests to the authorities to get rid of streets children, nothing has been done.

"We see boys as old as 18 years living on the streets under the guise of being street children. They have now resorted to raping women and young girls, especially school-going children," Ms Namukasa said.

Ms Mariam Nangobi, a banana vendor in Namutumba Town Council, said the street children no longer have the courtesy to ask money from passersby but instead pickpocket and steal petty items from unsuspecting pedestrians.

Causes

According to district authorities, the increasing number of street children in Busoga sub-region is as a result of domestic violence and child labour.

The Iganga District chairperson, Mr Patrick Kayemba, said street children in the municipality hail from Luuka, Mayuge and Namutumba districts.

Mr Kayemba cited divorce, gender based violence (GBV), under age marriages, low levels of education, poverty and poor government policies as some of the factors that have led to the increase of street children.

He noted that for authorities to get rid of street children, government needs to find a lasting solution to the issues and also sensitise residents on the dangers of domestic violence because no child is born on the streets.

Mr Kayemba revealed that they have embarked on campaign to re-orient mind parents of their responsibilities and also encourage them to take



Accused. Street children take a nap at one of the streets in Kampala. Street children in Namutumba have been accused of rape, defilement and robbery. FILE PHOTO

their children to schools.

"Last year, we launched a 'Go back to school' campaign after noticing that there were children living on the streets. We are doing this through counselling," he said.

The Namutumba District vice chairperson, Ms Amina Batega,

who is also the officer in-charge of gender, labour and children affairs, attributed the increasing number of street children to negligence.

"Last year's gender based violence report by Uganda Women's network ranked Namutumba District as top in Busoga Sub-region with 68 per

cent cases of violence registered," Ms Batega said.

She, however, noted that they have begun engaging non-governmental organisations to intervene in the fight against GBV.

The LCI chairperson for Namutumba Zone B Village, Ms Aidha Naigaga, revealed that on a monthly basis they receive about five rape cases committed by street children.

She, however, says such cases are on the increase because as authorities are financially constrained to transport the juveniles to remand homes and prosecute them.

According to police, many residents do not report the cases of domestic violence and defilement because of fear of victimisation.

"As police, we have tried to engage parents and educated them on the dangers of domestic violence but nothing is changing," Mr James Mubi, the Busoga East Police spokesperson, said.

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THE NUMBER OF RAPE CASES INVOLVING STREET CHILDREN REGISTERED IN NAMUTUMBA DISTRICT ON A MONTHLY BASIS

Mr Mubi requested leaders to join the police in identifying the origin of the street children so that they are able to find solutions.

The Bugiri District vice chairperson, Mr Moses Kaziba, said domestic violence is rampant in Busoga sub-region because parents, government and other stakeholders have failed to address the issue.

Mr Kaziba also blamed the increasing number of street children on 'wealthy men and women' in the area who employ them as sales people.

"Businessmen and women in Bugiri give these children items such as soda, water and fruits to vend but do not provide them with accommodation and they end up sleeping on streets," he said.

Ms Kawa Nalubanga, a resident of Bugiri, said she has three children who are on the streets.

"When my brother passed on, he left me with three children to take care of but they now live on the street. Although there is no parent who wants to see his child begging for money on streets sometimes it inevitable," she said.

Mr Saleh Kumbuga, the Namutumba District chairperson, said they are discouraging child labour and divorce after releasing that some children are living on streets, because their parents separated.

Mr Kumbuga said they are sensitising parents on practicing farming so that they can earn an income other than sending their children to beg on the streets.

Voices

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