

Arua street child earns a living from selling waste

Complaint. Karimojong pastoralists are accused of letting their animals destroy peoples crops.

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OTUKE. Anthony Ayo, 15, is a regular sight on the streets of Lira Town, where he always collects used plastic bottles.

After sorting the plastics, Ayo packs them in a polythene bag, which he carries on his back and then sells to scrap dealers.

"I sell each plastic bottle at Shs200 and the business is booming because we have customers from Kampala, Masindi, Tororo and South Sudan. In a month, I make between Shs50,000 and Shs80,000 from my sweat," he says.

"We found that domestic violence, land grabbing, abject poverty, HIV/Aids and child neglect are to blame for the rising number of street children in Lira."

TOM OCEN, PROGRAMME MANAGER CHILD RESTORATION OUTREACH

The youngster says he ended up on the street in 2008 at the age of six after his parents separated following a domestic brawl.

Tough life

"Life has not been easy for me and my 12-year-old sister but we thank God that we are all alive and healthy," Ayo says.

While he uses the money obtained from selling the plastic waste to buy food and second-hand clothes, he has another dream.

"I want to go back to school, study hard and become an engineer in future," says Ayo, who dropped out of school in Primary One.

Ayo's story epitomises the challenge of the growing number of street children in Lira Town. The Child Restoration Outreach



Innovative. Anthony Ayo gathers plastic bottles in Lira Town last week. PHOTO BY JEAN FRANK OKOT

(CRO), a local NGO, puts the number of street children in Lira Town at 600, while police put the number at 2,000.

CRO programme manager Tom Ocen says many street children were orphaned by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency while others are neglected by their parents due to domestic violence.

"We found that domestic violence, land grabbing, abject poverty, HIV/Aids and child neglect are to blame," he says.

However, Mr Ocen says since 2007, their organisation has identified and rehabilitated 932 street children.

"We provide them with life skills and give them packages like mattresses, food staff, scholastic materials and other essential requirements to support them while they are resettled in

the community," he says.

The resident district commissioner, Mr Robert Abak, notes

2,000

NUMBER OF CHILDREN ON LIRA STREETS, ACCORDING TO POLICE

that street children have become a major source of insecurity in the area.

"Some of them are now engaged in robbery, pick-pocketing and drug abuse," he says, calling upon development partners to join hands in ridding the town of street children.

The president of Pakistani Association in Lango, Mr Sadar Mo-

hammad Atiq Nawaz, says they are already mobilising funds to rehabilitate street children.

"We want to give them psychological support, basic life skills and vocational training," he says.

Appeal

The police community liaison officer, Mr Michael Oreh, calls upon members of the community to remove their relatives from the streets.

"We are also sensitising the community because children are not supposed to stay on the street. There is a need for all parties including politicians, cultural leaders, religious leaders, the business community, security personnel, and the community at large to wake up and take part in curbing the new trend," he says.