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Brian Babishanga, the distr-
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Karamoja teenagers want scholastic materials

AMUDAT

By Daniel Edyegu

As a way of keeping girls in school, teenagers in Karamoja sub-region have asked their parents to strive to provide them with scholastic materials and daily basic necessities.

During a meeting with parents, religious and political leaders, elders and local government technical staff at Moruita sub-county in Nakapiripirit on Tuesday, the teenagers stressed that most of their counterparts are lured into teenage pregnancies and child marriages due to lack of parental care.

"A girl comes to school without books, pens and sanitary towels because their parents have not provided them with these things at home. Such a girl is not in the right frame of mind to remain in school," Evelyn Cheptai, a Primary Five pupil of Moruita Primary School, said.

"They become easy prey for defilers, who lure them with simple things such as chapatti, handkerchiefs and small amounts of money," she added.

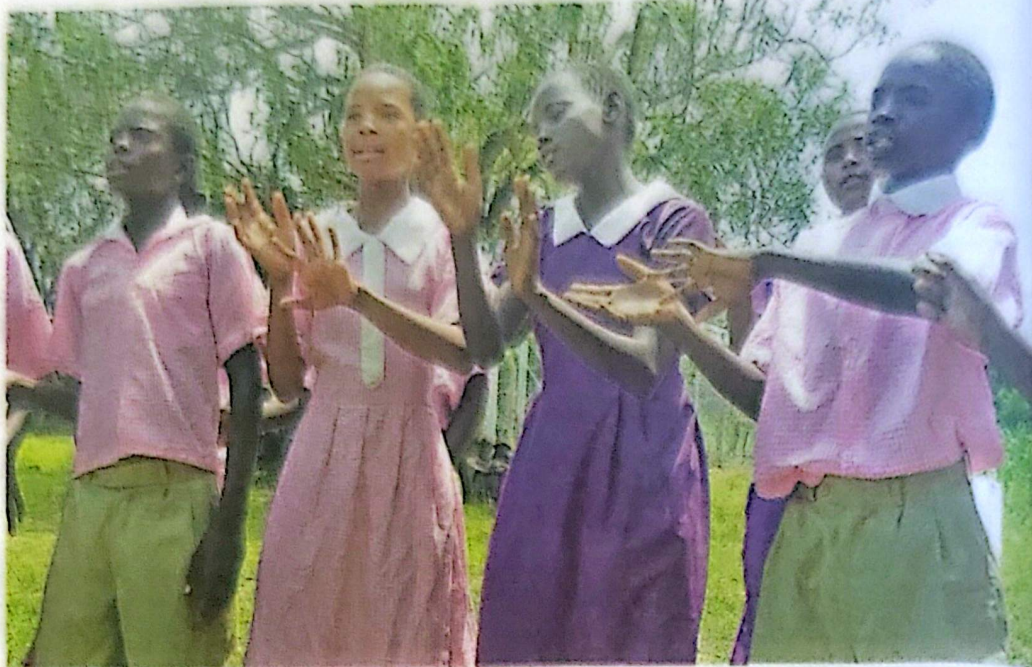
Alcohol

At another dialogue in Amudat town council grounds in Amudat district, Bakita Chelangat, a pupil of Katikit Primary School, explained that alcoholism among parents in the district has aggravated the rate of child negligence.

Menstrual hygiene

Sarah Amiti, a teacher at Moruita Primary School, said because most parents in the region do not provide for their children, this strains both the teachers and the school authorities while filling the gap.

"Where I teach, for instance, girls of menstruating age come to school without sanitary towels or even ordinary improvised material such as



Pupils of Moruita Primary School presenting a skit on child marriages and teen pregnancies in Nakapiripirit district on Tuesday. Photos by Daniel Edyegu



Mothers during the dialogue in Amudat district

cotton wool or clean pieces of cloth. These girls come without any spare uniform to change in case their periods start," she said.

The school has no washrooms or changing rooms to cater for these scenarios. So when periods come, we the female teachers have to step in and take care of the girls in our

homes," Amiti added. The dialogue in the seven districts of Karamoja sub-region, under the 'better life for a girl' campaign, is being conducted by Reach a Hand Uganda, a youth-led organisation with funding from UNFPA.

Asuman Bakshi, the Reach a Hand programmes manager explained that the dialogue

is meant to enable various stakeholders interact on issues concerning teenage pregnancies and child marriages so as to come up with solid strategies to check the vice.

"The rate of teenage pregnancies and child marriages is 27.9% in Karamoja sub-region," he said.

We are not here to dictate solutions. We need the teenagers to dialogue with various stakeholders to identify the root cause of the problem and provide workable solutions, Bakshi added.

Francis Kiyonga, the Amudat district chairperson, explained that the lead cause of teenage pregnancies in Karamoja sub-region is the high illiteracy rates among the residents.

With a dismal 12% literacy rate in the sub-region, Kiyonga said many parents do not attach value to education, but rather the cows they get from bride price when they marry off their teenage daughters.