Street begging. A blind man begs on Arua streets. Poverty has forced many people to move from rural areas to come and beg on Arua streets as one of the survival means. PHOTO BY FELIX WAROM OKELLO

Food scarcity pushing rural poor to beg for survival on Arua streets

Beggars. On Arua streets, an increasing number of street children, and beggars comprising old people, are making people feel uneasy or outright embarrassed.

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HOW IT STARTED

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WEST NILE. Many families in rural areas cannot now afford the recommended three meals a day.

Unlike in the past where many foodstuffs were brought from rural to urban areas, this is becoming increasingly rare.

Nowadays, the majority of the population lives on less than one dollar a day (Shs3,500) and this has forced some rural families to migrate to urban centres to beg for survival from middle income earners.

On Arua streets, an increasing number of street children, and beggars comprising old people are making people feel uneasy or outrightly embarrassed. Some of the beggars bark at the town dwellers who fail to give them money.

The National Household Survey conducted last year by Uganda Bureau of Statistics, indicates that West Nile sub-region is second poorest with 48 per cent of the 2.5 million people after Karamoja.

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Ms Susan Adiru, one of the beggars, says she is forced to beg because she has failed to fend for her children.

"For sure this act [begging] is helping me to look after my children. I am a widow and left in abject poverty. In my village, I did not have enough food or even money and this forced me to move to town to find ways of survival," Ms Adiru said.

"I am not here by mistake but condition of hunger has made me come here for now about seven months. Sometimes people give me money but it has also become scarce," Adiru Adds..

But some of the women and men are forced into begging because of limited land to farm and limited food security, making them vulnerable.

Ms Salome Candiru, a resident who has ever helped some of the beggars, says: "It is hard to give money to starving people with children in their arms. As soon as you give out money, hordes of other beggars will surround you. Some of them you see are genuine beggars who are really hungry and looking for food and clothing. But this is also a perfect opportunity for pick-pockets."

Daily Monitor has learnt that the fundamental thing here is that many beggars and street vendors are those

Voices

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they cannot find jobs there and so they try out their luck here; the centre of business.

Those who are homeless primarily due to mental illness or who have run away from an abusive home would probably be grateful for your gift.

Many of them stay in strategic locations such as churches, markets and at the gates of government offices. Mainly children carry badges that agitate for people to help in order to attain medication.

Arua District chairman Sam Wadri Nyakua, said poverty and food crisis in both urban and rural centres can be averted only that some people are lazy.

"This is why we have people leave their villages to come on the streets looking for food," he said.

He added: "Even though there is drought, people should plant short term crops so that they can be able to feed. We should act fast to ensure that people grow food crops because the demand is high both among the locals and the current refugees we are hosting in the region. So if people do commercial farming, this would enable reduction in food shortage."

One of the farmers, Ms Likico Lillian of Ambala village in Vurra Sub-county, says: "If people can use tractors then we shall have plenty of food. But here, some people have vast land and they cannot use hand hoes to open the land and besides, hiring tractors costs nearly Shs100,000 which hires more people to till land at Shs10,000 for an acre."

She said she rents an acre of land at Shs150,000, which she says is expensive and limits her to the small portion of land, hence affecting productivity.

Uganda's low agricultural productivity is a result of a lack of appropriate technologies and support for the rural farmers especially in this sub-region.

Overall, poverty in rural areas is hitting most homes because of inadequate infrastructure and lack of access to goods and services.

The road network is also in very poor condition and access to safe water is limited. Rural poverty is also closely related to lack of access to healthcare and education.

The NARO director in charge ABI-Zardi, Dr Sadik Kassim, says; "When the farmers plant timely improved varieties, we can avert hunger and poverty at household level. Farmers should choose high-yielding food crop because even from one acre of land, he or she can be able to get adequate food."

Shs150,000

AMOUNT OF MONEY THAT LIKICO LILLIAN, A FARMER IN AMBALA VILLAGE, VURRA SUB-COUNTY USES TO RENT AN ACRE OF LAND FOR FARMING

CamScanner