

NEW BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION

PROGRESS

Construction works on the new Jinja bridge which is part of the Kampala-Jinja Express Highway. The 525-metre cable bridge with a main span of 290 metres and a dual carriage is to cost Shs391b and is initially expected to be ready by April 2018.

PHOTO BY DENIS EDEMA



Officials blame pregnancies, parents for school dropouts

Concern. The rise in teenage pregnancies has been attributed to poverty, domestic violence and low education attainment.

BY MICHEAL WONIALA
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

BUTALEJA. It is uncommon to get teenage boys to engage in a discussion about teenage pregnancies. More so, when girls get pregnant, the responsible boys are out of the picture. And because they are not the ones who get pregnant, they are less concerned.

When a girl gets pregnant, her life takes a dramatic turn. She may drop out of school, be disowned by her family or even married off despite the age.

This is never the case for the boys responsible for the pregnancy; their studies are never hindered nor do their parents ever doubt their inno-

cence. Others even go ahead to deny pregnancies or even flee from their villages and schools.

According to reports, the number of adolescent girls in Uganda who get pregnant before attaining the age of consent has slightly increased from 24 per cent in 2011 to 25 per cent in the last seven years.

The rise in teenage pregnancies has been attributed to poverty, domestic violence and low education attainment among girls of 15 to 19 years with at least three in every 10 of them having no education.

Such are cases in Butaleja District, which ranks third in teenage pregnancies after Maracha District in the first and Masindi District in the second positions, according to Ms Betty Nesihwe, the managing Director of African Women Service Trust.

Ms Nesihwe says some parents allegedly force their children into early marriage to get bride price, a practice

ISSUE

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that has persisted despite efforts to fight it. She says due to early marriages and teenage pregnancies, the school dropout rate in the district account for 38 per cent.

"This is dangerous because it affects the development and increases maternal mortality rate too," Ms Nesihwe says.

But Mr James Waluswaka, the Member Parliament of Bunyole West, says in order to reduce teenage pregnancies, parents should work hard to sustain their families.

"Girls are forced into early marriages mostly due to failure by their parents to take care of them," he says.

In addition to parents' failure to support their children at home, it is reported that they have poor attitude towards education, especially for the girl child.

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Respect PWDs - inspector

JINJA: Jinja District Inspector of Schools Eriya Kisambira has warned against discrimination of Persons With Disabilities (PWDs). Mr Kisambira last week said PWDs are protected by the Constitution and can perform better if included in any system. Mr Kisambira made the remarks at Namulesa Primary School in Mafubira Sub-county following the appointment of a visually impaired head teacher, Mr Muzamiru Musembya, whom he said was appointed after realising that his performance in the schools he has been serving was excellent. [Abubaker Kirunda]

Thieves stand for LC

AMURIA: The vice chairperson of Amuria District local government has expressed fear that suspected thieves in certain villages in the district have registered to be elected as LC1 chairpersons. Mr David Ewayu said the suspected thieves known are for stealing cattle. He added that besides registering, they have mobilised people to vote, adding that this is a worrying development that must be checked. He called on residents to be vigilant while voting. [Simon Peter Emwamu]

School dropouts rise as teenage girls opt for marriage

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Voices

"Of late, cinema halls are being established everywhere. Here, children are being exposed to pornographic material at tender age. Why such halls can't be used to sensitise our children on the dangers of early marriages and teenage pregnancies,"

MILLY MUGENI,
BUTALEJA DISTRICT
WOMEN MP

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MANAGING DIRECTOR
OF AFRICAN WOMEN
SERVICE TRUST

Mr Micheal Dangu, the district youth councillor, says most of the parents do not provide children with scholastic materials and meals, which forces them to fall prey to the men.

Even amid such challenges, a section of local leaders believes there is need for the local government leaders to conduct sensitisation on the dangers of early marriages.

"The leaders should educate the masses about early marriage and how it can be solved. They should roll out a sensitisation campaign to cover schools," Ms Justine Mwima, one of the locals, says.

Ms Milly Mugeni, the Butaleja District Woman MP, blames teenage pregnancies on the parents.

She says: "We are concerned because this affects us all. NGOs should partner with the district local governments to curb this challenge."

She says this can be achieved through establishment of video halls in the trading centres where people can be gathered to get information.

"Of late, cinema halls are being established everywhere. Here, children are being exposed to pornographic material at a tender age. Such halls should be used to sensitise our children on the dangers of early marriages and teenage pregnancies," she notes.

She also proposes punishment for men convicted of defiling girls to be more stringent.

Empower teenage girls

However, a consortium of civil society organisations thinks empowering the teenage girls is a lasting solution to the challenge.

They are demanding for increased accessibility to all forms of contraception, including emergency contraception and improved access to abortion for marginalised youth.

The CSOs, among others Justice and Rights Associates (Jura), say increased accessibility to contraception and safe abortion would reduce the rate of teenage pregnancies.

briefly

NRM chairperson