

Influence. Many school-going children due to social pressures and desire to be like their colleagues who are able to fend for themselves end up joining the lucrative business.

BY ARTHUR WADERO & LEONARD MUKOOLI
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

Manafwa pupils abandon school for quick money in sand mining

MANAFWA. The booming sand mining business in the eastern district of Manafwa has caused many school-going pupils to abandon studies to take part in the activity.

Pupils now carry out sand mining on River Manafwa.

John Mandu, a Primary Seven dropout, says he quit school because of the quick money in the sand mining business.

"The temptation is high because on a daily basis one makes at least Shs20,000 from sand mining. I think this is better than going to school and returning on an empty stomach," he says.

Mandu also reveals that his having seen his colleagues who had abandoned school before him thriving he was tempted to join them.

"I wanted to be like them that is why I finally gave up on my studies. I don't regret," he adds.

Kennedy Masaba, another school dropout, says his parents supported him to join the sand mining business.

"My parents secured for me a spade at only Shs15,000 and that was the starting point," he recalls.

"At first, I used to multi task by attending school and mining. Finally, I decided to concentrate on this business," he adds.

Sand mining on Passa River, one of the Manafwa's tributary. Miners receive clients from the neighbouring districts of Mbale, Tororo and Bukedea.

The buyers pay between Shs30,000 and Shs40,000 to fill up a Fuso truck.

On average everyday between 6pm to 11pm, more than 12 Fuso trucks ferry sand from the mining site in Bunekea village, Bubwayo Sub-county.

Mr Brian Mandu, a 26-year-old and one of the casual workers at the site, says because of the too much work load at the site, they find it hard to chase the school-going pupils.

"We are not much concerned about the plight of children dropping out of



At work. Children mine sand from River Manfwa recently. Many school-going children are dropping out to venture in sand mining business. PHOTO BY LEONARD MUKOOLI

school to join this business because we did the same. Besides, we have a lot of workload," he says.

Mr Mandu, a Primary Six dropout, boasts of building a permanent house through engaging in sand mining business.

"There is quick money buried in this river. I joined when I was only 12 years but I have managed to marry and build a house," he says.

He says many school-going children due to social pressures and desire to be like their colleagues who are able to fend for themselves end up joining the business.

"Some of them leave school earlier to join us so that they get some money to afford lunch and breakfast," he observes.

However, Mr Mandu, also notes that like any other business, sand mining also has hazards.

Last month, two of the children sustained minor injuries and himself suffered a dislocation after a water wave pressed his knee.

"I was rushed to Butiru Health Centre but health workers did not do much. I was later referred to Mbale Referral Hospital," he says.

Mr James Mausio, a resident, blames community leaders for the high school dropout rates, saying they have failed to put strict measure on children joining sand mining business.

"The rate at which children are abandoning school is alarming and nothing is being done to curb the

Voices

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BRIAN MANDU,
CASUAL LABOURER

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"Parents are to blame because they do not follow up their children to school. On various occasions we have warned them against child labour."
JOHN MUSILA,
MANAFWA DISTRICT CHAIRPERSON

"As authorities, we strongly condemn this. We shall take measures to curb it. This calls for combined efforts with other district authorities and community member to fight the practice,"
ERIDARD ZADOCK,
DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICER

vice," Mausio alleges.

Mr Mausio also says parents have also failed in their responsibilities, a reason children have opted to fend for themselves.

Mr Alex Nazeba, a parent, says children offering labour at various sand mining site, greatly risk their lives each time they plunge their feet into the river.

"They risk drowning and contracting disease associated with water and sand mining," Mr Nazeba says. He says on countless occasions, children have been mistreated by their employers after scooping the sand and sometimes they are not paid.

Mr Jonathan Mausio, an elder, says the government and local leaders have neglected their supervisory role.

The Manfwa District education

failure to take on responsibility and keep the children in school.

"Parents are to blame because they do not follow up their children to school. On various occasions we have warned them against child labour," he says.

Article 34(4) of the Constitution, stipulates that children shall not be employed to perform work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education or to be harmful to their health.

The law further demands that any person who has knowledge of a child being employed in a way that is not legally acceptable, must report the matter to the labour officer of the area.

Related cases

In May, a mini survey conducted by *Daily Monitor* revealed that an estimated 1,095 pupils in primary schools in Apac and Amolatar districts dropped out of school at the end of first term due to hunger and starvation.

In July last year, authorities in Namanyigo District banned illegal mining of gold, following a noticeable decline in the number of pupils turning up for school.

Many children of school going age opted to forego school for employment to ferry soil which is normally dug up to extract gold particles.

Others are employed on grinding machines.

officer, Mr Eridard Zadock Mudangi, strongly condemns the act, saying it blinds the pursuit for a prosperous future for the children.

20,000

THE LEAST AMOUNT OF MONEY CASUAL LABOURERS AT THE SAND MINING SITE EARN PER DAY

"As authorities, we strongly condemn this. We shall take measures to curb it. This calls for combined efforts with other district authorities and community member to fight the practice," he says.

The district chairperson, Mr John Musila, however blames parents for

KEY ISSUES

Dropping out of school.

Children in Manafwa District have continuously dropped out of school to join the sand mining business.

Neglect. Mr Jonathan Mausio, an elder, says the government and local leaders have neglected their supervisory role.

Peer pressure. Some children say they joined the lucrative business after seeing their colleagues prospering.

Way forward. Some Manafwa District authorities have pledged to introduce strict measures to curb the vice.