Christine Nakwang, Lokeriu Primary School pupil/Editor-in-Chief

Help children to stay in school

In my life, I have come across several people who almost ruined my life. Recently, I had a friend at school who kept telling us to escape from school. We refused to take her advice, but she always insisted.

One day, we followed her to town because we were curious to find out why she always went there. When we returned to school, our teachers punished us and told our parents about it. I swore never to follow my friend again. My friend moved on to several schools but she did not perform well in class. She dropped out of school after she became pregnant and gave birth to a baby. Her life has not been good.

From that moment, I have learnt that it is important to have good friends and focus on studies. As we mark World Children's Day, I would like people to know that peer pressure is a big problem affecting children. We need a strong campaign in schools to encourage young people to make good friends and reject bad advice.

Apart from peer pressure, education facilities in my district, Kaabong, are not up to standard. Our school is dilapidated and we have no fence. The classes are small and sanitary facilities are poor. We find ourselves sharing only two latrines and the washrooms are in bad shape. Even people in the neighbourhood use our facilities since there is no fence to block



them. We would like to see an improvement so that we can learn well.

The dispensary at Lokerui has no proper facilities and no ward for expectant mothers. We also have a big challenge of early marriages in the district. Some parents force their daughters to drop out of school to get married. They usually wait for the children to return home after the school term and then encourage them to marry so that they (parents) can get cattle as marriage gifts.

This practice is dangerous and it is denying many girls a chance to be responsible citizens in the future. The Government should investigate these cases and educate parents about early marriages. We need to start a campaign to keep children in school in my district and across the country. We need to encourage parents to keep children in school and stop forcing them to get married.

Violence against children is another concern in many homes and alcoholism is a big driver. For children, if your parent stops you from going to school, do not accept it. Go to school because if they follow you there, your teachers can help you to talk to them.

As children, we must study hard and aim higher to be like our role models. If you study, you can get anything you want. If you get married early, you are going to suffer. We need to avoid bad habits like fighting or insulting other people, if we want to succeed.

I appeal to the Government to build more classrooms and drill a borehole in our school. Teachers need to come to class early and teach. Parents must take children to school and encourage them to study hard.

I thank UNICEF for giving me the opportunity to take part in activities to mark World Children's Day in Kampala. I also thank Vision Group for making me famous as editor-in-chief.

The people who work at the New Vision are very friendly and I am happy that I learnt about how the newspaper is prepared, assembled and processed and I will tell all my friends about it.

As told to Taddeo Bwambale by Christine Nakwang a Primary Six pupil at Lokeriu Primary School in Kaabong district.

Fact file on early marriages in Uganda

According to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) 2011, 46% of girls marry before they reach 18 years.

The survey findings show that 49% or nearly three million women between ages of 20-49 got married by the age of 18 and 15% (around 900,000 women) married by the age of 15.

The reasons for early marriages are rooted in traditional and social norms, including gender bias, poverty and biases against girls' education.

According to the National Strategy on Ending Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy, teenage pregnancy rates are highest in northern Uganda (59%), followed by western (58%), eastern (52%), east central (52%), West Nile (50%) and central region (41%).

Compiled by Taddeo Bwambale

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