

Letters

LETTERS

Drug abuse: A whole generation is affected

There is an enemy that has emerged. It is on the verge of destroying our beautiful Uganda; drugs, boda boda road impunity, and, of course, corruption, just to mention a few. Any concerned Ugandan would agree that the rate at which drugs of various types have infiltrated our country and destroyed our young generation is alarming. We're on the verge of losing a whole generation to drugs. What a loss indeed.

A year or so ago, the fluent, poetic Luganda speaker, Journalist Solomon Kawesa ran a comprehensive documentary on NTV, about how drugs have penetrated our educational institutions.

As shocking as it was, the drug cartels had not only penetrated universities but secondary schools, too. It was such an evidence-based documentary which we thought would prompt the concerned educational authorities to act.

Drugs are not only in schools. I understand some people use them as preservatives in baking, some put it in their tea instead of ginger, *entangawuzi*.

I've lived in the UK and the US, and have seen how devastating drugs can be to young people. They destroy, maim, incapacitate, and kill.

They break up families, parents' hearts, and promote all sorts of crimes. Drugs destroy a country's education system and become a dark end in themselves.

Hopefully, the government already has some plans, but the earlier they come out, the better. We've started seeing young people doing the unimaginable, sacrilegious things which no normal human beings would even dare attempt.

Some of them are even too shocking to mention here. The drugs business has hit our rural areas. Its combination with alcohol is leaving only devastation to already impoverished communities.

In the 17th Century, China was almost destroyed because of opium brought in by the British in exchange for silver.

When their emperor protested against the trade, it sparked off the first opium war waged by the British merchants and backed by their imperial bosses. The Chinese emperor lost the war. The trade resumed in triple force.

And I imagine that could be the genesis and largely the reason why the present Chinese government has zero tolerance against drugs. They catch you, they hang you. I hope and pray that every parent teams up and supports the government in whatever measures it may have and in whatever form.

Coupled with the above is the rise of boda bodas in the country. Because of their easy mobility, it seems to me that some of them have become an easier transport option for some of these vices. Not all of them, of course, and I apologise where necessary. I know that there are some innocent riders providing for their families and serving the country.

But some have become conduits for the trade and a danger to their passengers. Last year, as I drove from Entebbe Airport towards Bwebajja, a boda boda rider, whose motorcycle was parked on a road shoulder, jumped into the middle of the road.

My vehicle just skidded, missing him by a whisker! I calmly pulled aside, only for him to walk up to and confront me as to why I didn't knock him down!

The reason for his death wish was that someone owed him money and didn't want to pay him back.

Well, if I were to throw myself under the train for the many people who owe me money, I would be gone. What if he had passengers? The thought made me shudder.

I can compare the drugs situation in this country with the HIV/Aids pandemic in the early 1990s. Hadn't it been due to the steady, serious, firm leadership we had, HIV would have ripped the country to threads.

Indeed, one of the many achievements President Museveni will be remembered for is his firm, consistent, practical fight against HIV. That chalk on the blackboard, the drum he beat, woke up Ugandans. We need the same drum against drugs.

And to us who have just celebrated Easter, here's its meaning - to show and live in that early morning light that radiated love to the sick, agonising world. And there's no worse agony than those who are living under the yoke of opium. They need our hand. Please let's stretch and reach them.

Dr Grace P'Karamura,
UK