

Keep children in school to gain from population

EDITOR: As we celebrate World Population Day, we need to come to terms with the opportunities and challenge a big population can have on a country so as to adopt measures to curtail population explosion.

Several arguments in favour of big populations have been traded before including a big market. This is rather flawed as it presupposes purchasing power, which is not obvious.

Given the economic growth rate of less than 5% per annum, we need no consultants to tell us that it is only prudent to sire children that we can ably look after. Therefore, while we ponder what we must surely do to ably occupy the 78% Ugandans under 30 years of age, we have the opportunity to control further escalation of our dilemma since it is already apparent

that our resources are stressed by population growth resulting into poor services delivery.

First, we must ensure that we retain at least 90% of the children that enroll in Primary One in school until they complete O'level. At the moment, over 1.8 million enroll in Primary One, but only less than 600,000 complete Primary Seven. Retention of children in school until the age of 18 on average will obviously expunge the huge number of children born due to the early dropout of school.

Secondly, it is now imperative that Uganda must roll-out comprehensive pregnancy prevention measures to address unplanned pregnancies. This is multifaceted and requires various stakeholder engagement — religious leaders that promote abstinence,

cultural and community leaders that should now denounce polygamy, health professionals to popularize science-based birth control methods that should especially promote vasectomy and Government for its oversight and regulatory function.

In sum, we can no longer afford not to do anything about population explosion. With increasing conflict on land escalating across Uganda due to fights for survival; it is important that leaders add to their respective messages the need to sire children that we can afford to provide for. Granted, there is UPE/USE where children can study for free. However, the quality of these programs must improve for us to be able to produce employable youth.

**Richard Mubiru,
Lufunve - Mukono**

PICTURE BY FRANCIS ENODIT

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Letters Editor, P. O. Box 5 Kampala; or email: letters@newvision.co.ug
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