

**Concern.** The girls, who are largely teenagers, come majorly from Musuto and Marale villages in Bunguhoko Sub-county.

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# Mbale town grapples with child prostitutes

**MBALE.** Anyone who regularly plies the Mbale-Tororo route in the late evening has certainly seen young skimpily-dressed girls move towards Mbale town in a group.

As young as 14, the girls gather at Mbale Post Office on Republic Street as early as 8pm before collectively flooding the corridors of Naboa and Republic roads. Others spread out to parts of North Road, the upper side of Cathedral Avenue and Bishop Wasiky Road, the town's night busiest parts.

These bevy of beauties who are largely teenagers, come majorly from the areas of Musuto and Marale villages in Bunguhoko Sub-county and Nkoma ward in Northern Division and at about 9pm, cunningly present themselves to any male, who risks passing through their areas of operation.

The street lights in the respective corridors have been vandalised to allow the girls to operate in darkness.

Ms Harriet Namono (not her real name), who is one of the child prostitutes, says she was lured into the trade by her aunt.

"She forced me into it but now I am used. I have got good friends we work with here and retire together at middle night," she says.

Ms Namono is a student at one of the schools in Mbale town.

"I sometimes carry a pair of casual clothes when I am going to school so that from school, I just wait for my colleagues from town," she says.

She says she also has managed to recruit her colleagues.

"We are now many from my area. That is good because we work together," she says.

Child prostitution, according to the UN, is the sexual exploitation of a child for remuneration in cash or other kind. The Ugandan laws prohibit prostitution and having sex with a girl below 18 years.

Mr Moses Bwayo, the manager of Child Outreach Restoration (CRO), a non-governmental organisation, supporting street children in Mbale town, says many girls are streaming into the trade in order to make ends meet.

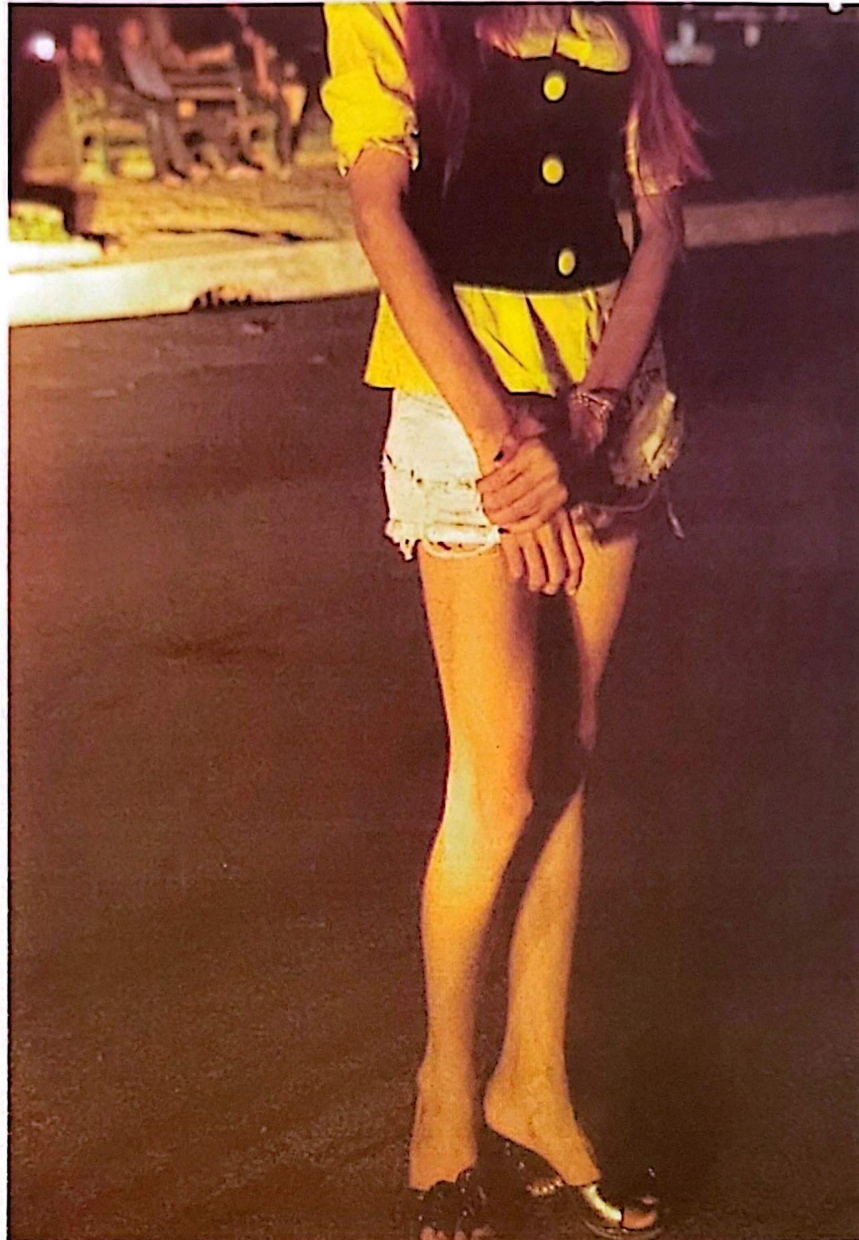
"It's the story of desperation that forces some of them on the streets to make ends meet," Mr Bwayo says.

Describing it as glaring child abuse at its worst level, Mr Bwayo says local authorities need to act first to save the children.

"The children have to be rounded up on a daily basis from the streets in order to create fear in them and their parents or guardians," Mr Bwayo advises.

He says it is a shame to have young girls attending school during day and practice prostitution at night in order to pay their tuition and also cater for their other basic needs.

Leaders and human rights organisations operating in Mbale District have on several occasions raised alarm over the increasing number of



**Vice.** The child prostitutes are said to be operating mainly on Republic Street and North Road in Mbale town. NET PHOTO

by municipal officials to act.

The secretary Marale Village, Mr Taibu Abbas Wakoko, who is also a primary teacher at Bumageni Primary School, says it is the parents to blame for not taking care of the welfare of their children.

"Parents have totally neglected their children, especially in these slum areas. It's the responsibility of everyone, including children, to look for money to meet family needs such as paying rent," he says.

Many girls leave their homes

back from school, they change and go into sex trade with the knowledge of their parents," he says.

"We want to ensure that prostitution is completely fought in Mbale town because it's the mature women who are luring children into that business," YASIN WABOMBA, DEPUTY SPEAKER, MBALE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

"Most of them do not reach home from their schools. They come back

sleeping and they are not questioned," he says.

He says when, as local leaders, attempt to track these girls and task their parents to act, they do nothing instead parents blame local leaders for interfering in their family affairs.

Mr Kenneth Asaba, working with Innovation for Change, a community based organisation, attributes the growing vice to biting poverty and unemployment in Mbale slums.

He says the main inhabitants in the slums are Karamojans. During

## What they say...

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CHILD PROSTITUTE

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TAIBU ABBAS WAKOKO, SECRETARY MARALE VILLAGE

"The girls are mostly propelled by desire to secure a meal. They come here looking for what to eat but when they fail, they end up parading themselves over there."

STEVEN MADOI, VENDOR

brewing illicit brew, Malwa as their sources of income.

Mr Steven Madoi, a vendor on Naboa Road, says many of the girls are desperate and in need of basics.

"The girls are mostly propelled by desire to secure a meal. They come here looking for what to eat but when they fail, they end up parading themselves over there," he says, pointing at a dark corridor where they wait for clients.

Another boda boda rider on Kumi Road says the girls are very bold and they are guarded by night security guards.

"They are protected by security guards, who keep watch as they render the sexual services to the clients. The security guards quell any chaotic scenes that may emerge," he says.

The Mbale Municipal Council health inspector, Mr Robert Walyaula, says they have tried to round up the children from the streets but they keep coming.

"With the help of police, the Municipal authorities have on periodical occasions mounted operations and effected several arrests," he says.

He says they will continue with the operations to rid the streets of child prostitutes, saying it sets a bad precedent for the future.

Mr Yasin Wabomba, the deputy speaker, Mbale Municipal Council, says they are proposing to pass a by-law against prostitution in Mbale Town.

The Elgon police spokesperson, Mr Suwed Manshur, says police have on several occasions tried to intervene to curb escalation of this vice but the court system lets them down.

## ISSUES AT HAND

**Victims.** As young as 14, the girls gather at Mbale Post Office on Republic Street as early as 8pm before collectively flooding the corridors of Naboa and Republic roads.

**Complained.** Leaders and human rights organisations operating in Mbale District have on several occasions raised alarm over the increasing number of child prostitutes and the reluctance by municipal officials to act.

**Blame.** The Elgon police spokesperson, Mr Suwed Manshur, says police have on several occasions tried to intervene to curb the vice but the court system lets