

Busoga grapples with child labour

Labour and probation officers across several districts in Busoga Sub-region say an estimated 30 to 34 percent of children are engaged in labour.

BY ABUBAKER KIRUNDA

The fight against child labour in the Busoga Sub-region remains a major challenge, with officials and researchers warning that the practice has reached appalling levels.

Labour and probation officers across several districts report that an estimated 30 to 34 percent of children are engaged in various forms of labour, driven by poverty, weak enforcement of laws, and expanding economic activities such as agriculture, mining and informal trade.

Abubaker Waiswa, the Iganga senior labour officer, attributed the difficulty in stopping child labour to high demand for casual labourers.

"In Iganga, parents look for employment for their children, making the fight against this problem difficult," Mr Waiswa said.

He said children are employed in stone quarries, restaurants and markets, adding that children often view their working peers as role models and are influenced to join similar jobs.

According to Mr Waiswa, ordinances have been enacted, but little has been achieved. "We passed the Iganga local government child protection ordinance, which provides for a six-month jail term or a fine of Shs40,000 for offenders. However, implementation has been difficult because the Constitution focuses on protecting children's rights without clearly outlining punishments," Mr Waiswa said.

Mr Richard Nusu, Jinja City North Division labour officer, attributed child labour to low awareness among residents



Children sell bananas on Rippon East Road in Jinja City during school hours instead of attending class. PHOTO BY DENIS EDEMA

about the dangers of the vice.

He further disclosed that ignorance of the law is also widespread among those promoting child labour in the region.

Mr Nusu also cited the practice of people buying goods from children in business as another factor fuelling the vice. He proposed the introduction of stronger laws that penalise even those found buying items from children hawking cooked maize, sweet bananas and eggs, among others.

The Namayingo District senior labour officer, Mr David Bwire, said mushrooming gold mines in the area are breeding grounds for child labour.

Mr Bwire explained that some gold mines are located near homesteads, making it difficult to detect child labour.

He applauded the UPDF soldiers de-

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ployed around water bodies to regulate fishing, saying they have reduced child labour at landing sites after children were chased away from activities such as sun-drying silver fish.

Mr Patrick Osinya, the Mayuge District senior labour officer, said the expansion of cocoa farming in the area has increased child labour.

He said children are hired by cocoa farmers to clear bushes and harvest cocoa pods. Mr Osinya revealed that out of the 16 sub-counties in Mayuge District, child labour is prevalent in 12 of them.

He blamed parents for the continued prevalence of child labour, saying they are sending children to work on plantations to earn money for household needs, as many lack sources of income.

The Kaliro District Probation Officer, Mr Nelson Jumire, pointed to rice growing in Busoga as another factor propagating child labour, adding that children are often used to chase birds away from rice plantations.

Mr Jumire also pointed to sugarcane farming as a biggest driver of child labour in Busoga. He said children are used to cut sugarcane, load it onto trucks and work in plantations.

Mr Christopher Mombwe, the chairperson of the Busoga Sugarcane Out-growers Association, said the expansion of sugarcane farming across Busoga has led to the establishment of weighbridges, which has created additional labour demands within communities.

"These weighbridges installed in different communities to facilitate the sale of sugarcane have become a challenge because in those areas you find children loading and offloading sugarcane from trucks. Fighting child labour when work is being brought to their doorstep is a hurdle," Mr Mombwe said.

Mr Mombwe added that government should instruct sugar factories to engage farmers on avoiding the use of child labour at all facilities involved in the sugarcane business.

The Programmes Coordinator of the Network for the Marginalised Child and Youth (NEMACY), Pastor Paul Batambuze, attributed child labour in Busoga to parental neglect.

"Parents have abandoned their responsibilities of providing necessities for children. As a result, children end up in labour for survival," Pastor Batambuze said.

A survey conducted between 2023 and 2025 by the non-governmental organisations Platform for Labour Action (PLA) and Action on Poverty (APT UK), with support from the European Commission, revealed that child labour in Busoga currently stands at 34 percent.

Nearly 138 million children worldwide were engaged in child labour in 2024, according to estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Uncief.

Of these, around 54 million were involved in hazardous work that threatens their health, safety, or development.

Child labour affects almost 8 percent of all children globally, with the majority of about 61 percent working in agriculture, livestock, and fisheries sector.