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UNDER THE THEME:

***CHILD LABOUR, A THREAT TO THE FUTURE SKILLED
MANPOWER IN UGANDA.***

Author

Fredrick Charles Guluma

E-mail: gulfredrick@yahoo.com / gulfredrick@gmail.com

Volunteer with Foundation for Development Needy Communities NGO

&

Member of Amnesty International-Uganda chapter (Mbale group 1)

C/O Amnesty International- Africa Regional Office

Kampala Uganda

Preamble

According to the Uganda Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Ms. Syda Bumba, Child labour is one of the main sources of child abuse, exploitation and a potential threat to the health, safety, moral and psychological development of children. This phenomenon has gained prominence in contemporary interventions promoting the rights and welfare of children worldwide and is recognized as one of the five core standards of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Child labour is an old scenario in the Ugandan society and goes on unnoticed by individuals and organizations to understand its effects, causes and ramifications. There is little information available to the public who are unable to differentiate between child labour and child work.

ILO recognises the fact that many countries do not keep child labour statistics because they believe that it is not covered under their current law and cannot be included in their official statistics¹. ILO has been depending on UNESCO figures by submitting that about 20 percent of school going children were not receiving an education in 1990 and it can be presumed that a substantial number of children were involved in economic activities. The ILO estimates that in developing countries, there are over 250 million children between the age group of 5-14 years practicing child labour.

In Uganda, statistical data on child labour cannot provide proof, which can clearly distinguish between working children and those involved in child labour. The data available has no definitive agreeable parameters to distinguish between harmful work and that which is not, although Employment ACT 2000 cap 219 article 5 (3,6 and 9)² which specifies hours of work for particular occupations as hazardous, especially where children are likely to be exposed to toxic substances. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics Demographic and Health Survey (UBOS 2001), it is estimated that out of 7.9 million children in the country aged between 5-17 years, 2.7 children were involved in child labour. According to the 2003 Uganda Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Survey, it is estimated that there are 1.5 million working children. This is a clear illustration of differences in methodology and definition which makes it difficult to track exact changes in child labour occurrence over time.

The participation of children in economic activities is more pronounced in the rural setting than in urban areas. It should be observed that the recent economic structural reform programmes in Uganda and other developing countries has also exacerbated the number of children involved in child labour in urban centers. The vast majority of child workers in the rural countryside are found in commercial agriculture. While in urban centers, you will find children engaged in petty trade, transport, domestic work, building and construction, etc

The World Development Report of 2007, reported that in many poor families, child labour represents a significant share of house-hold income. The report adds that the unfortunate trade off is that children who sacrifice schooling when young are likely to be poor as adults. In Uganda, child labour stands at 13 %, of which the majority (82%) combines work with study. Young adults work in order to finance their secondary education which would otherwise be unaffordable.

According to the Uganda National Union of Trade Unions (NOTU), child labour is not only a matter of economics which involves the way things are done and is long traditionally acceptable by society as

¹ <http://www.ilo.org/public/English/comp/child/policy/towards.htm>

² *This article states that no young person may be employed in any employment, which is injurious to health, dangerous or otherwise unsuitable. It also specifies that no person may employ a person of under or under the apparent age of twelve years except on such light work as the Minister may, from time to time, by statutory order prescribe.*

normal and other cultural factors where the majority of children are found but there are serious social, economic and development implications on any country affected by this challenge.

In a competitive world, national priority largely depends on human skills and tolerating child labour is inconsistent with the human resource investments that countries must ensure to secure their future³. It is presumed that children make up 62% of the poor in Uganda⁴ and with the ever growing child labour phenomenon, estimates indicate that 2.7 million children are working and more than half hem (54%) are aged between 10-14 years and 1/3 are less than 10 years old. In addition out of the 11 million people engaged in agriculture, 30 % are children⁵. This paper describes the horrible working and living conditions that children are subjected to and the interventions by the various stakeholders in the elimination of child labour in Uganda.

Who is a child?

The Uganda constitution of 1995 declares the child as any person below the age of 18 years. Yet, the children's ACT, cap 59 provides for the care, protection and maintenance of children and similarly defines a child as under the age of 18 years. It also highlights the basic requirements, which all stakeholders are supposed to uphold.

What is child work?

According to the ILO Convention number 138, child work refers to activities done by children within their families such as washing, fetching firewood, cooking and farming, which all are done under close observation and supervision of their families (parents/guardians). Children at their own will, at home normally perform these activities. The work must be light and interesting to the child and is aimed at mentoring the child for the future roles they are expected to do in maturity. Child work is expected to be valuable experience and an avenue to grow to physical and intellectual maturity in a situation free of commercial exploitation, moral decadence or punishment. Such work should not inflict pain or physical retardation.

What are child Rights?

These are the needs any child must be provided with to ensure that the child grows up healthy, happy and useful both to himself or herself, family and society. The children's rights that are stipulated in the Uganda children's ACT include:

- a) Growing up with a family and possess a name and nationality.
- b) To be loved.
- c) Receive protection from harm, injury, abuse, defilement and to be guided by parents.
- d) To receive audience when a decision affecting her or him is being determined depending on her/his age and ability to understand.
- e) To be educated, receive medical care such as immunization against polio, diphtheria, measles, whooping cough, cholera, etc.
- f) To be protected from harmful customary or cultural practices.
- g) To be protected from harmful employment.
- h) To be accorded special care and dignity, education and training where necessary if suffering from disability in order to develop the child's potential and self-reliance
- i) To be given priority to receive help and protection in any situation of armed conflict or civil strife.

³ Introduction, Page 2: Child labour policy and Guidelines for Trade Unions in Uganda-NOTU/ILO/IPEC PROJECT 2005

⁴ Ministry of Gender, Labour & Social Development, Draft Child Labour Policy;2002:3

5. Source: Uganda Bureau of Statistics

- j) Above all children must be allowed to play, have leisure and participate in sports, including positive cultural and artistic activities.

What is child labour?

Child labour is work that threatens the health, safety, physical growth and moral development of children involved in work that deprives them the opportunity to go to school. Child labour includes use of dangerous tools, long hours of work, heavy workloads and tasks, exposure to toxic chemicals, cruelty, sexual abuse and exploitation of children with work when they are too young for little pay or payment in kind and under hazardous conditions.

The worst form of child labour refers to slavery, such as sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, use of children in armed conflict, using children in procurement and offering them for prostitution and pornography, using children in illicit activities and work that is likely to harm their health, safety and morality.

The notion of child labour is therefore placed on children below the age of 18 years who work on a regular and continuous basis to earn a living for themselves or on behalf of their families. They work for long hours, sometimes without wages, in conditions that forces them to prematurely lead adult lives and condemned to a cruel future⁶.

In Uganda, the International Labour Organization/International Program on Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC) program is targeting children engaged in commercial agriculture, urban informal sector, commercial sexual exploitation and child domestic work.

What are the worst forms of child labour?

1. Domestic servants/ helpers. This is considered to be the most prevalent form of child labour and the use of children as domestic servants is known as a socially acceptable traditional practice. Children perform household services and chores for employees, run errands, clean and do laundry work, fetch water and fire wood, cook and work long hours for little pay, payment in kind or no payment.
2. Street children involved in numerous hazardous works like car washing, sorting garbage and metal scrap, exposure to harsh weather health risks and violence.
3. Children in war and conflict areas, where children are made to carry the loot and some times used in combat to kill innocent victims.
4. Commercial sexual exploitation of children (Child prostitution).
5. Children working in agricultural plantation areas (Sugar cane, Rice and tea plantations) where they are exposed to weird acts like scaring birds when they are naked, loading sugar canes, plucking tea and spraying plants with chemicals.
6. Children involved in stone crashing, mining, construction and manufacturing
7. Children in the informal sector.

What are the Underlying causes of child labour in Uganda?

Insecurity caused by insurgency or guerilla activities in some districts in Uganda such as Gulu, Kitgum, Lira and Pader in Northern Uganda; Soroti, Kumi, Katakwi, Kaberamaido and Bukedea in the North Eastern Uganda and Kasese and Fortportal in Western Uganda, which has resulted into the

⁶ See *Child labour in its worst form. A working guide for Peer educators, Parents and the community- Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDL)*

existence of large internally displaced people migrating to other districts. The experience of children who have been rescued from the rebel forces of the Lord Resistance Army rebels (LRA) in northern Uganda is too ghastly to be described in words. Children are subjected to torture and carrying heavy loads like sacks of beans, sorghum, potatoes, maize flour, goats meat and worse of all they are forced to carry guns and ammunitions for the rebels and them selves to use in combat when confronted by the advancing Uganda government armed forces. According to the ILO International programme for elimination of child labour study report of 2004, it was stated that the common age at the time of abduction is 14-17 years⁷.

During its 20 year insurrection in northern Uganda, the LRA has abducted, tortured and killed thousands of people and displaced millions who are now homeless and staying in IDP camps. Attempts by the government forces to rescue the abductee's is extremely difficult in that the LRA is composed of the very children they intend to rescue and they face them in battle. Some of these child soldiers are rescued with serious injuries or even death during combat. The northern Uganda region has been disrupted and an entire generation has grown up without reaping the benefits of peace. There is a major humanitarian crisis in Northern Uganda caused by the LRA, with its violent campaign directed against civilians and involving large-scale abductions of children and massive displacement of the population. An estimated 1.6 million internally displaced people, out of a population of approximately 2.9 million, are living in overcrowded camps in squalid surroundings.

According to the UNICEF Country Programme Progress Report of 1999, the LRA and Allied Defence Forces (ADF) rebels abducted more than 10,000 children and 500 children respectively since 1986. The abducted boys are inducted into the rebel ranks to commit atrocities like killing, looting, ambush and rape at a very tender age. The girls suffer from being raped and forced to marry the rebels, cook or carry looted property. This is one of the worst forms of child labour and the international community should intervene in alleviating this deplorable situation that has bedeviled this part of the globe. According to the UNICEF Humanitarian report of 2006, there are 1.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs)- 80 percent of them children and women living in more than 200 camps in the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, Lira, Apac, Soroti, Katakwi and Kaberamaido. The report further reveals that out of an estimated 25,000 children (including 7,500 girls) abducted by the LRA rebels since the conflict began, approximately 1,000 are child mothers who conceived during their captivity⁸.

The impact of the deadly HIV/AIDS pandemic, which has resulted into the emergence of many child-headed house-holds, is another factor that has led to the increase of incidences of child labour in Uganda. According to a recent sample survey in some districts in Uganda, it is estimated that there are approximately 42,000 child headed families in Uganda. Some of these children are rejected by their relatives and they resort to manual jobs like riding bicycles to transport people around rural trading centres and urban areas at a tender age of about 15 years or less depending on the need. Children are forced to engage in petty trade of selling vegetables, oranges, boiled eggs, sugarcane and other essential commodities in order to raise money for their school fees. This leads to stunted growth among children, loss of education, skills and future leaders.

The drastic drop of commercial crops such as vanilla, coffee and rice which is cultivated by some parents as an income generating activity. This has perpetuated poverty because the parents can't afford to provide for the needs of the children and as a result children are sent in trading centre's to hawk essential items and vegetables in order to get some money for survival of their families. Some of these children are forced by their parents or guardians to work by selling boiled eggs and other edible foods to raise money for their fees. This leads to stunted economic growth and perpetual poverty, which restricts the potential of children.

Some parents have adopted the habit of sending their children to work in order to raise money for their daily bread. This is due to low levels of income (Poverty). Like earlier stated in the fore going

⁷ ILO-IPEC 2004: *Report on thematic study on child labour and armed conflict in Uganda* Pg 55,58 & 59.

⁸ See UNICEF Humanitarian Action Report 2006-Critical issues for children on http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/HAR_06_UGANDA.pdf

context, children have become a common public nuisance in urban and rural trading centres trying to work under hazardous conditions like selling food items for payment in kind or cheap payment. Abject poverty with all its characteristics of malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, squalid surroundings, low life expectancy and high infant mortality rate are some of the harsh conditions that force these disadvantaged children to resort to child labour as a way of survival.

The ever-increasing burden of orphan hood in the country is among other factors contributing to the occurrence of child labour. Orphans have become a disgrace in the country and most of them resort to offering child labour as a means of survival in the harsh environment they live in after the loss of their parents. This is another disaster that is causing loss of market for skilled manpower because children provide a ready source of manual labour force.

Food scarcity due to draught caused by too much sunshine leading to bad weather patterns and poor crop yields or harvest. This usually affects the nomadic tribes like the Karimojong in North-eastern Uganda. According to recent media reports, young under-aged Karimojong girls from North-eastern Uganda districts of Moroto, Kotido and Nakapiripirit have been ferried to trading centres in Teso region in eastern Uganda to be sold cheaply as domestic maids. These children are forced to abandon their homes because of the harsh weather conditions caused by droughts and the rampant poverty. (*See The daily Monitor news paper article: **K'jong children now sold in Kenya**, October 23, 2006 issue, website: www.monitor.co.ug*)

According to the 2006 survey on child protection by Save the Children International Uganda (SCIU) in the districts of Moroto, Kotido and Nakapiripirit, it was observed that brokers at the weekly cattle markets in the neighbouring Katakwi district sold children and they extended their child trafficking activities in other districts in Uganda and across the border in Kenya, especially in the town of Eldoret. The report revealed that desperate Karimojong parents sell their children, especially girls in Teso at weekly cattle markets like Ochrimongin in Katakwi district to raise money to maintain the remaining members of their families. Brokers usually pay between 2 US dollars and 16 US dollars for the children and sell them for about 160 dollars. There is need to protect these children from the various forms of abuse and this needs a comprehensive coordinated response by all stakeholders. (*See The monitor news paper article: **Illiterate Karimojong girls fetch higher bride price**, October 28, 2006, website: www.monitor.co.ug*)

Street work done by street children for purposes of survival in the harsh conditions on the street is another visible example of child labour. Poverty, orphan-hood and mistreatment by care-givers are the main causes of the increasing number of street children in Uganda. These children are vulnerable to abuse and face numerous health risks, including lack of education, skills training, adequate shelter and nutrition. This is another area that needs urgent intervention on the part of government and the NGO community. Street children are involved in hazardous work conditions like carrying heavy loads and doing much of the manual work. This has the effect of causing stunted economic growth, perpetual poverty and loss of skilled manpower to the society in general.

Delinquency of children which causes them to be beyond parental control, care and guidance is a factor worth mentioning. Most of these children who are now classified as street children have abandoned their homes due to peer pressure and urban excitement.

Peer group influence, which leads to child exploitation in the form of prostitution, gambling, selling of labour, etc.

Culture/Traditions/Attitude of adults towards children is another factor. Most parents (Adults) prefer to over burden children with hard labour tasks like digging, thrashing and winnowing rice in the rice fields, scaring birds in rice fields in humid weather conditions, fetching water from wells from distant places and doing all the domestic chores at home like cooking food and hewing wood.

Bad/poor parenting styles may drive children into child labour. Parents who neglect their children cause them to become juveniles and practice child labour as a way of trying to be independent from their

hostile parents. Recent studies reveal that boys and girls from the nomadic tribe of the Karimojong in North-eastern Uganda shun going to school in preference for cattle keeping and preparation for marriage respectively. According to Paul Abul, a district education officer in Karamoja region, Karimojong children resent formal education because of cultural influence from their elders. (See *The monitor news paper article: Illiterate Karimojong girls fetch higher bride price*, October 28, 2006, website: www.monitor.co.ug)

The intrinsic forces/ pressures within children that desire independence from parents/guardians forcing them to desire to be free from adult care and protection is a factor worth noting.

Unbalanced conditions in the rural areas and attraction to urban centers (push-and-pull factors are increasing the trend of urbanization in Uganda, which lures children into migration to urban centers in hope of enjoying city lifestyles. This leads to tendencies of their being exposed to child labour.

Gender imbalances and discrimination against one gender (gender child taking over the mother role of caring for the other siblings prematurely e.g. cooking for the entire family of many people, taking up household chores which a mother/guardian or aunt would have done.

Policies concerning macro-economic framework do not directly target the affected group of vulnerable children but have a great impact on the social conditions of these children. In Uganda for instance, there is the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP)⁹ which operates around three major areas that include improving the quality of life of the poor through provision of health care, education, water and sanitation. If this strategy can be implemented and the key players play their part, then it would go a long way in addressing the problem and issues of child labour.

A cross section of a class of people engage in the use of child labour because the labour force provided by children is cheap, some times it is free and in most cases it is some times paid in kind. A vivid example is the dealers in metal scrap who use street children to collect metal scrap and pay them cheaply. The same applies to dealers in coffee produce who use the services of the children to handpick coffee berries and drying them in the sunshine.

During my recent research in the rural country side, I found underage school going children who had been sent away from school because of lack school fees and scholastic materials engaged in exploitative hard labour of crashing grey stones at a stone quarry at Bubirabi village in Mbale district of eastern Uganda. The incidences of children selling sugar cane and other edibles in the trading centre in order to raise money for scholastic materials like exercise books and pencils despite the introduction of the so called Universal Primary Education (UPE) is a normal phenomenon in the rural countryside. It is worth mentioning the fact that school going children leave suburbs of major towns and the city of Kampala for instance over the weekend to sell edible food stuffs like boiled maize, locally made baskets, etc in order to raise funds to cater for their scholastic materials like exercise books, pens, pencils e.t.c.

There is evidence that excessive child labour exists in Uganda but the extent and magnitude of the problem is unfortunately unknown. This is especially worse for children who work as domestic servants or maids (house helps-in categories of girls/boys). Investigating child labour in the domestic sector is difficult because of the hidden nature of the practice. Child domestic servants or maids perform nearly all the household chores at their employers' homes in exchange for food, pay or shelter. They perform

⁹ *The Uganda Government with support from and in collaboration with development partners has been implementing the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) since 1997 with the principle aim of reducing mass poverty among the populations in the country. In simple terms, the PEAP guides public actions that focus on delivering the basic necessities that people need in their daily lives and creating a conducive environment for peace, good governance, agricultural development and private investment. The PEAP interventions are reviewed every three years and revised to ensure that people have quality services.*

activities like baby sitting and child care, fetching water, cleaning the house, washing utensils, shopping, preparing children to go to school, laundry and even collecting children from school. They are also involved in activities like selling food and food stuffs in market places and by the road side, performing other jobs like selling water, working in beauty salons, shops and bars. Children in this sector are subjected to long hours of work, heavy domestic chores, appalling working conditions, and sexual abuse from employers, children and relatives of employers, denial or delay of payments and physical punishment for mistakes at work.

It should be noted that the children's ACT of Uganda, statute part II, section (6), stipulates that: "It shall be the duty of a parent, guardian or any person having custody of a child to maintain that child and in particular that duty is to give a child the right to:

- a) Education
- b) Immunization
- c) Adequate diet
- d) Clothing
- e) Shelter and medication

In part II (9) "No child shall be employed or engaged in any activity that may be harmful to his or her health, education, mental or physical or moral development."

Risks and Interventions

Recent studies indicate that Uganda risks having a shortage of skilled manpower in the future if more children continue to be employed in the country. At the moment the number of children engaged in child labour in Uganda is estimated to be over two million.

According to the industrial relations officer of the Federation of Uganda Employers (FUE), Michael Matovu, child labour is a development issue. He argues that national development is only possible when the people's education and skills are exploited at the right time and if the country is to be productive, then children should go to school instead of working. "If the current tendency of employing children continues at the same rate, then Uganda is bound to run short of skilled manpower in the future," he laments. Further more, according to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, in 2000/2001 alone, there were approximately 2.7 million child labourers.

FUE is in a serious campaign of sensitizing the communities against child labour throughout the country. Though child labour is partly caused by poverty, it also perpetuates poverty because it leads to lack of education or skills, which are needed for future employment. Further more, it causes loss of productivity, financial loss, undermines employers corporate responsibility and causes economic sanctions in form of boycotts to the employer.

The FUE is the sole national representative body of employers in the public and private sector in Uganda. Some of the members of FUE have challenges of child labour in their companies. For instance, a number of sugarcane out growers employ children. Awareness on child labour issues has been increased among FUE members and organizations that were initially against discussing child labour issues, have began cooperating on programmes of withdrawing or preventing children from engaging in child labour. Awareness seminars for managers from selected companies like Uganda Tea Association, Uganda Coffee Association, Uganda Building civil Engineering and Constructors Association and Uganda small Scale Industries Association was instrumental in changing the attitudes of the FUE members on the issue of child labour.

It should be observed that a working child abandons education and grows into an adult engulfed in unskilled and poorly paid jobs, works under hazardous conditions and remains wallowing in the vicious circle of absolute poverty. According to the program coordinator of the Rural Development Media Communications (RUDMEC), Hamid Kizito, child labour upholds the vicious cycle of poverty. He argues that poor people without education skills pass on the same attitude to their children and the circle continues repeating it self. This leads to stunted economic growth and loss of skilled labour force that can boost the economy.

RUDMEC is one of the stakeholders in the fight against child labour in Uganda with support from the International Labour Organization, International program for Elimination of Child Labour (ILO/IPEC). RUDMEC recently concluded a successful tour of four districts in eastern Uganda, namely; Butaleja, Mbale, Busia and Jinja, where it campaigned against child labour through the use of video documentaries. The documentaries were successful because it portrayed the message to the people and it had a positive impact on the communities. The documentaries were shown in the Doho Rice Irrigation Scheme in Butaleja district, which is reknown for employing a big number of child labourers. The rice scheme covers an area of approximately 1,000 hectares and the surrounding area used for small-scale rice farming is almost the same size.

According to Tom Malinga, the chairman of the Doho's Child Labour Committee in Butaleja district of eastern Uganda, children were engaged in rice fields for transplanting rice, bird scaring and winnowing instead of going to school but after sensitization, the parents and children themselves appreciated the dangers of child labour on their families and the nation.

However, other interventions other than sensitization had to be used. Economic empowerment of the victims or their parents was necessary because to a large extent it was poverty that was sending the children to work.

Malinga is grateful to various stakeholders who have helped the poor villagers by funding different projects with a view of empowering them economically so that they stop sending their children to work. The projects include rearing goats, chicken, vegetables and fruit growing, carpentry, tailoring and rice milling machines, which have been beneficial to the villagers. This initiative has eliminated child labour in places like Doho and attendance in schools has improved tremendously within a short period of time.

Mr. George Odeng, a Head teacher of Nampologoma primary school in Doho area is satisfied that most children have gone back to school and attendance has risen to 800 from the previous 400 pupils and the number of students going to secondary schools has dramatically improved. Odeng argues that children resorted to child labour because their parents were unable to raise money for their scholastic materials and other basic necessities of life.

The Doho experience is a practical success of the war against child labour but there is need to venture in other areas of Uganda where many children are still employed in the worst forms of child labour. These include tea growing areas of western Uganda where an estimated 40, 000 children below the age of 10 work at the tea growing estates on a full-time basis in Tooro region alone, according to the International Labour Organisation.

Tooro region is one of the leading tea producing areas in Uganda where child labour is reportedly rampant (*See Daily Monitor news paper feature: **Tooro tea farms hire 40,000 children**, Tuesday, page 18, May 23, 2006, website: www.monitor.co.ug*)

Another visible example of child labour is found in Bubirabi parish in Bungokho Sub County of Mbale district in eastern Uganda, where under age school going children are involved in crashing grey stones at a local quarry. The stones are used in road and house construction. The children are engaged in hitting the stones into pebbles and that is how they assist their families to get income that can be used to pay fees, buy scholastic materials and sustain their livelihood. Some of them miss going to school because when they are sent away from school due to lack of scholastic materials and top up of fees, they resort to cheap labour of selling sugar canes and hitting stones at the nearby quarry to get some money.

The same trend goes on in almost all major urban and rural centres in Uganda, where disadvantaged children such as street children, disabled children, children from nomadic tribes like the Karimojong or orphans are subjected to the worst forms of child exploitative labour. The war in northern Uganda can't be under estimated because it has caused a humanitarian crisis that needs peaceful resolution of the conflict. Children live in deplorable conditions as they seek refuge in towns and internally displaced camps. The intervention of government, CSO's and NGO's is needed in alleviating the plight of these

disadvantaged children. It is against this background that the Juba peace talks in southern Sudan is in progress to enable the people of northern Uganda, especially women and children in IDP¹⁰ camps to return to their homesteads and engage in agricultural production and possibly live a happy life. To achieve this initiative, the Uganda government has launched a master plan called Peace Recovery Action Plan (PRAP) to rehabilitate northern Uganda.

The Foundation for Development of Needy Communities (FDNC) in eastern Uganda provides para-legal advisory services (PAS) in remand homes as an intervention in dealing with juveniles. It must be observed that it is the delinquency of children that leads them to be beyond parental control, care and guidance. This is one of the reasons mentioned earlier on as one of the causes leading to child labour because children abandon their homes and want to be independent. The main mission of the PAS is to decongest detention centre's but they also counsel juveniles while in police detention cells and contact their parents to secure police bond for their temporally release. They also provide para-legal clinics where they screen juveniles and reconcile parents with their delinquent children through alternative dispute resolution.

Despite the current plight of children in Uganda, the government is committed to ensuring that all children enjoy their rights as enshrined in the UN convention on the rights of the child (CRC). This commitment is shown in the measures that have been taken by the government. The constitution of the republic of Uganda guarantees children the right to education, medical treatment, care, protection and other social economic benefits.

According to the Uganda Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Hon. Syda Bumba, Child labour is one of the main sources of child abuse, exploitation and a potential threat to the health, safety, moral and psychological development of children. In this regard, her ministry embarked on a sector wide approach of consultation of a spectrum of stakeholders and developed a national policy on child labour. The policy is inspired by the Uganda Constitution Article 34 (4) and expounds the Draft National Employment Policy and the Social Development Sector Strategic Investment Plan.

In addition, after the 1990 World summit for children, the government developed and launched the Uganda National Programme of Action for Children (UNPAC) in 1993 with a mandate to provide a framework for all stakeholders to protect the rights of children in the areas of survival, development, protection and participation. The children's statute (1996) is a child friendly law, which operationalizes the constitution and reinforces the UNPAC. Further more, the children's statute-1996 is a comprehensive child care legislation, which incorporates the UN convention on the rights of the child, the African Union charter and placing for the care and protection of children directly with parents and communities. The National Council of Children (NCC) was created in 1993 by the Uganda government to undertake research and advocacy for children's rights in the country is the coordinating and monitoring agency of UNPAC. NGO's dealing with children operate under the umbrella of the Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN). Child advocacy Programme officers (Probation welfare officers) have been deployed to oversee the district action plans for children in almost all the districts in Uganda.

Recommendations

There is need to put more resources in the translation of the children's ACT into local Ugandan languages so that communities at the grassroots are sensitized about the basic requirements of the laws governing child care and protection.

There should always be sensitization programs in all media outlets all over the country so that all stakeholders are involved in the adoption of the relevant children's statute.

¹⁰ IDP camps are the internally displaced camps in northern Uganda where people fleeing from the on going conflict between the Lord Resistance Army and the government forces have fled for refuge. This has caused a humanitarian crisis.

The children's law should not remain in the domain of books but must be put into practice and discussed in all fora like the local community meetings, religious gatherings and ceremonies.

Perpetrators of child labour should be prosecuted so that they can serve as an example for other child molesters in the country. The issue of child trafficking in north eastern Uganda, where Karimojong children are sold off by their desperate parents in order to survive in the harsh conditions of poverty caused by bad weather patterns, must be dealt with through a comprehensive intervention by all stake holders.

Government must undertake the priority of empowering rural communities through diversification of the already existing economic activities by introducing small scale industries and adding value to the agricultural products so that parents have enough income to cater for the needs of their families. The Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) and the recently launched *bonna bagawale* (wealth for all) initiatives need to focus on one critical issue and that is extending knowledge on enterprise development, business skills and practice to the communities that are still engulfed in poverty. It will be futile to assume that poverty is caused by lack of money.

Communities should be sensitized about the threat of the HIV/AIDS pandemic because this is the leading cause of orphaned children in Uganda. Development partners involved in the fight against the spread of this pandemic should be encouraged to continue emphasizing more donor support in this endeavour. Though Uganda is a role model in the HIV/AIDS eradication campaign, there should not be any laxity in the current measures used in halting the spread of this disease.

The donor community should encourage and support the Juba peace initiative to reduce the suffering of the people in northern Uganda. I want to commend the Norwegian government for their contribution of 1 million dollars towards the United Nations fund for the Juba peace initiative.

Family planning initiatives through child spacing should be encouraged as a way of controlling unnecessary births. Ugandan women are known to be very fertile and the use of appropriate family planning methods should be applied as a measure to control unnecessary child-births. Moon beads¹¹, a natural birth control method and a modification of the safe days for women with a 26-32 day menstrual cycle to prevent pregnancy was recently launched in Uganda by the first lady, Janet Museveni. The inter-religious council of Uganda, the Ministry of Health and the United States government have endorsed it for married couples. (*See Daily Monitor newspaper feature: Full woman magazine, Health and fitness: Bead is the word, Saturday, page 16, October 14, 2006*)⁷

I have to emphatically state that parents should be encouraged to keep children at school because education saves lives by teaching children how to protect themselves from danger; teaches them about good nutrition; disease prevention; improves their chances of making a healthy living and helps them escape from poverty.

¹¹ Introduction of the moon beads, a string of 32 beads is lauded as the new contraception and a natural method without side effects and 95 per cent effective. A single red bead starts the cycle on the first of seven days set aside for menstruation, safe days are marked by 13 brown beads, 12 white beads represent unsafe days- when a woman is most fertile and likely to get pregnant.