

CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILDREN IN UGANDA TODAY

In Uganda, a child is regarded as someone who is below 18 years of age. There are many challenges faced by this age group. However, I would like to briefly dwell on one which is poverty among many challenges in this write up. This challenge of poverty has led to the three subsets that include low rates of education, lack of access to health care and early marriages

Uganda/the Republic of Uganda is a land-locked Country in East Africa bordering with the Democratic Republic of Congo in the West, Kenya in the East, South Sudan in the North Tanzania in the South. It is in the African Great Lakes Region and shares Lake Victoria with Kenya and Tanzania while also lying within the Nile basin.

Its population is approximately 45.74 million (World Bank, 2020). 8.5 million of this population resides in Kampala which is Uganda's capital and largest city. With its population increase over the past years, Uganda is expected to double its population from 2020 to 2060 making it more densely populated than India today. The young population from ages 0 to 14 currently stands at 21 million.

Uganda was ruled by the United Kingdom (UK) from 1894 to 1962 when it gained independence. Since then, it has faced many violent conflicts within... (Kyeyune, 2021). The conflicts led to poverty, inefficient and poor access to health care, low education rates, early marriages especially for the girl child. Almost half of Uganda's population is children from the ages of 0 to 14 at 46 percent of the general population, representing one of the youngest populations in the world (World Bank, 2021). Although poverty reduction has been significant over the past three decades going down from 56.0% in 1993 to 21.4% in 2016, Uganda still remains a country that struggles with poverty.

Uganda's economy largely depends on Agriculture and it has faced drought in past years. This has caused many homes to have poor health outcomes due to lack of proper nutrition. limited education for a big number of children from hard-to-reach locations. In these locations parents cannot afford school fees, despite the introduction of Universal Primary Education(UPE) in January 1997 and Universal Secondary Education(USE) 2007 by the National Resistance Movement Government. In other words, a large population is unable to afford the basics of life like food, clothing and shelter. As a result, this civil disorder has led to low rates of economic growth and the group of people that suffers more are children, more especially the girl child.

To some extent, inefficient and lack of access to health care has resulted in higher mortality rates and increased incidences of disease in children. Almost 80% population lives in hard to reach areas where transport (a Boda) cannot be afforded to access a health unit. Again children in Uganda, are at risk and have few opportunities to get out of this impoverished state (Owori, 2020). It is because of rampant poverty and lack of access to resources that force many parents to restrict their children from attending school. Instead, the children go to work full time as a way to contribute financially to the family, work in conflict zones, or marry at a very young age which are all very dangerous for the child, particularly the girl child. Also, the educational challenges are enormous, for instance large class sizes limiting children individuals' attention; learning becomes uneven where slow learners fall or left behind, resulting in drop outs.

Child Marriage is another sad but frequent and painful reality in a large population of girls and boys in Uganda. This leads girls to not completing their education, suffering gender-based violence and the vicious circle of poverty.

In addition to the challenges faced by the children above, the youth also suffer unemployment, underemployment, low quality work due to numerous factors as well as inefficient employment policies, initiatives and programs. This situation in Uganda, has put the youth (15-30 years old) unemployment rates estimated at 64 % This means that the youth cannot support themselves or contribute to the communities' development.

Since 2023 in June, when the Catholic Religious Sisters Health Care Initiative Uganda (CRSHIU) was launched and spread its wings in the communities, some strides have been taken to empower both the children and youth in Uganda through sensitization and curative programs. Please Sisters let us not grow tired in empowering God's children. Let us put our efforts together and do "one step at a time" that shows and leaves impact. We cannot do anything without God; may God be our source of strength always.

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