

Clergy call for end to bad social norms in Karamoja

KOTIDO

By Hope Mafaranga

Excessive alcohol consumption in Karamoja sub-region has contributed to an increase in HIV infections, family instability, gender-based violence, as well as early and forced marriages, leaders have said.

Regina Imuret, the vice-chairperson of Kalanga district, said leaders have not taken keen interest in addressing alcoholism yet it has negatively impacted the lives of women and girls.

"When men return home drunk, they harass the women and the long-term consequence is divorce and the suffering of children, who end up dropping out of school. Our girls have been forced into marriage before the age of 18, while boys become street children," she said.

Imuret raised the concerns during the launch of Pastor Letters and training workshop organised by the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) in partnership with Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (ADRA-Uganda) at Caritas Hall in Kotido district recently.

Religious leaders from different faiths met in Karamoja to find lasting solutions to the negative social norms in the area.

Pastor Samuel Kizito, the HIV/AIDS national co-ordinator at Uganda Union of Seventh Day Adventist Church, said the body of Christ has been abused by people who believe in violence and other anti-Christ behaviours.

Kizito said religious leaders shun talking about family planning, gender-based violence, early/forced marriages and HIV, yet they affect the people they serve.

"Regrettably, gender-based violence (GBV) occurs in homes of our believers. It has often resulted in long-term distorted perceptions of God, self and others," Kizito said.

He asked victims of GBV to come out of the shadows and seek help.

Kizito said the pastoral letters (resolutions) will also address the spiritual questions of abused people, seek to understand the origins of the abuse and violence, and develop better ways of preventing the recurrence of the vices.

William Kiberu, the ADRA-Uganda regional manager for north Karamoja, said IRCU has a powerful structure to address social norms and can easily create change in society.

"Religious leaders are respected and have a big following. They meet



PHOTO BY HOPE MAFARANGA

Samuel Kizito (centre), explaining how negative social norms in Karamoja will be solved as ADRA publicists Diana Balaba and Booker Ajuoga listen. This was in Kotido district recently



people when they turn up for prayers and apart from preaching the word of God, they can use the pulpit to advocate human rights, resolve conflicts and cause change," Kiberu said.

He said religious leaders have done great work in society through counselling, which has addressed mental health issues and added that the launched pastoral letters will

supplement the clergys' work.

The Abim Resident District Commissioner (RDC), Samuel Mpimbaza Hashaka, said there is need for the people of Karamoja to change their attitude to create room for forgiveness and new beginnings.

"The people of Karamoja are hurting from the wounds that they suffered during the period of disarmament. They also suffer from negative social practices such as gender-based violence, defilement, and poverty. There is room for reconciliation," he said.

Diana Balaba Sande, the advocacy and public relations officer of ADRA-Uganda, said the through the Action for Social Change project that is implemented by ADRA-Uganda in Karamoja, religious and political leaders will use their platforms to address negative social norms that are hindering progress in the region.

"The leaders will also use this space to address challenges that came with the closure of cattle markets and the COVID-19 lockdown," she said.

Kotido RDC Peter Logilo Ngorok asked religious leaders to help the Government in sensitising their congregations on health and sanitation issues in their community.

"The religious leaders have a weekly interaction with the community during prayers. Their audience is always attentive and we ask them not only to preach the word of God, but also incorporate social and economic development messages into their preaching," Ngorok said.

He asked the youth to embrace government programmes such as the Youth Livelihood Fund and Emyooga to improve their lives.

"In this era, we should embrace development and I want to urge the youth to involve themselves in income-generating activities and desist from cattle rustling," he said.

Ngorok added that God demands that people love, worship and serve Him, but it will be impossible to fulfil His commands when the region is engulfed in conflicts.



Karimojong men dancing at a function in Kotido. Most men in the area have abandoned cattle rustling after disarmament

Residents complain of stinking cemetery

MASINDI

Residents of Western cell in Central division, Masindi municipality, have expressed concern over the stinking cemetery. Residents have started abandoning houses adjacent to Masindi municipal cemetery. Fred Byarufu, the LC1 chairperson of Western cell, said the cemetery got filled up two years ago, but Masindi municipal authorities continue to bury there. "Bodies are buried in shallow graves, resulting in a strong stench," he said. The municipal acting medical officer, Godfrey Mirimo, said due to budgetary constraints, they have not bought land for a new cemetery.

Leaders partner to fight gender-based violence

TORORO

Leaders in Tororo district have agreed to fight gender-based violence, which is one of the causes of poverty in the area. The commitment was made during a stakeholders' dialogue organised by Forum for Africa Women Educationist Uganda chapter in Merikit, Rubongi and Osukuru sub-counties. It was attended by the clergy, cultural leaders, security heads and LC officials. Osukuru LC3 chairperson John Paul Okanya encouraged the leaders and parents to always counsel families and children caught up in violence rather than thinking of taking them to the Police.

Religious leaders pray for Arua city

WEST NILE

Religious leaders from different faiths in Uganda have dedicated Arua city to God. The city and the region at large were dedicated during a prayer breakfast organised by the National Fellowship of Born-Again Pentecostal Churches (NFBPC) in Uganda under the umbrella Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) at Mayor's gardens in Arua city. Bishop Joshua Lwere, the overseer of NFBPC in Uganda, while delivering his sermon during the dedication prayers, said when the cities are dedicated to God, He takes control of them and its people receive blessings.

APPEAL

Kotido RDC Peter Logilo Ngorok asked the Karimojong to desist from criminal acts that are likely to take back the region to its dark past.