



HELP for children in UGANDA



Information for Teachers

The following are the key underlying problems of orphans and children in exceptional circumstances in Kalangala District:

The traditional African extended family-based care system for orphans where all children belong to the extended family has been overwhelmed by the rapid increase in the number of orphans in the society caused by the AIDS epidemic and civil conflict.

The social welfare system in Uganda in general and Kalangala District in particular is not adequately organized to cater for the large number of orphans and children in exceptional circumstances. There are no specific plans for the provision of education, healthcare and other community services for orphans and children in exceptional circumstances in the outlying islands of Kalangala District.

As in many other districts in Uganda, the local contribution from district revenues is very limited due to the low income-base of the community. The programmes being implemented by local governments in the various sectors are not sufficiently funded to support the social needs of the community and especially those of the orphans and children in exceptional circumstances.

Some children have no relatives to turn to. In such cases the oldest child takes on the role of head of household. Such families live in extreme poverty and may only be supported by handouts from neighbours. Other childcare programmes have been

completely dependent on foreign support, which, when donor support ceases, forces the project to close and the children are thrown back onto the community.

BACKGROUND

Kalangala is a decentralized district situated in Lake Victoria in south-central Uganda. It is made up of 84 islands, known as the Ssesse Islands, consisting of 432 sq km of land scattered over an area of 9000 sq km. It is divided into two counties (Bujumba and Kyamuswa) and six sub-counties, Mugoye and Bujumba in Bujumba county, and Kyamuswa, Bufumira, Mazinga and Janna in Kyamuswa county.

The Ssesse Islands were isolated and left to lag behind in central government development programmes since the British established the protectorate administration in 1900. Following an outbreak of sleeping sickness in the 1930s the islands were closed and depopulated by the forced migration of the population to the mainland.

In 1975 Idi Amin granted district jurisdiction over the islands and converted them into a resort for his own use though no developmental efforts were put in place for the local people.

In 1986 when the present government came into power and the country gained more stability, many people returned to the islands. Of the 84 islands, 63 are inhabited mainly by fishing settlements (or landing sites) though most of the district population of 24,700 are on the two main islands, Bugala and Bukasa. This population number has risen from 16,400 in 1991 (census figures) which is attributed to the rapid growth of the fishing industry, now

one of the leading exports for Uganda, attracting people from all over the country to the rich fishing waters of Lake Victoria. Traditionally fishermen have an itinerant lifestyle, moving from island to island following the migrations of fish shoals. They live in wooden huts in small, crowded landing sites on the shores of the lake.

Recent improvements in facilities, though still very limited, have encouraged settlement with more men bringing families and building permanent houses. There is still a high level of mobility, bringing with it a number of social problems.

OCCUPATIONS

By far the majority of the male population are fishermen. However this source of employment is threatened by evidence that fish stocks are rapidly becoming depleted due to over-fishing. Timber mills provide timber for furniture, boat-building and house construction. Some people farm, and grow cash crops such as coffee and palm oil. Women are engaged in small-scale crop farming for home consumption and trading. Some women are involved in fish drying and smoking for export to Rwanda and the Congo. Others are employed in stone quarrying for building and road construction.

TRANSPORT

There is a 3 times daily ferry service connecting the main island (Bugala) with the mainland. Public transport in the form of a bus and 3 mini buses only run once a day from Kalangala town to the main Kampala road. Motorbikes provide transport for short distances and trucks carry goods and sometimes people. Large wooden boats powered by outboard engines provide inter-island transport.

Most islands have no roads and bicycles and head porters are the only means of transport.

CLIMATE AND SOIL

Kalangala district lies across the equator. This location gives high temperatures and high humidity all year round with a bimodal rainfall pattern. The soils are generally deep fertile loam interspersed with rocky areas. The lakeshores are sandy in places

with forest growing up to the shore in many areas. The climate and soils support a luxuriant vegetation growth all the year round. There are large areas of forest and tall grasses, mainly elephant grass and panicum maximum, and hyperpernia spp in areas with rocky and sandy soils.

The soils and climate in Kalangala would support productive agricultural enterprises but there has

been little emphasis on agriculture as it is quicker and easier to make money from fishing.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Most landing sites have minimal facilities. Only 10% of households have access to safe drinking water with the majority drawing their water from the lake which is also used for bathing, washing clothes and human waste disposal. Although a number of latrine blocks have recently been built by ActionAid, the majority of the population has no form of sanitation other than uncovered pits or the lake. The incidence of malaria is very high due to the prevalence of mosquitoes especially around the lakeshores. Malaria and gastroenteritis are the two main causes of morbidity and mortality.



HIV AND AIDS

While statistics for the country as a whole show that the rate of HIV infection has been decreasing since 1992, the number of AIDS cases has continued to rise. It is estimated that 110,000 children under the age of 15 years are living with HIV/AIDS of which 10% were new AIDS cases in 2000. 85,000 children have died of AIDS and AIDS-related illnesses since the beginning of the epidemic.

No baseline survey has been carried out in the district but anecdotally it has been suggested that the incidence of HIV infection is as high as 80% of the population. The itinerant lifestyle of some fishermen, the high level of alcohol consumption and the lack of options for girls encourage promiscuous behaviour. Early 'marriages' (some girls are as young as 10 years) often to men with existing families elsewhere, are common. "The AIDS scourge has continued to claim many people in the district due to the 'don't care' attitude exhibited mainly among the youth" (Socio-economic Survey 2000). Although there are no HIV testing facilities in Kalangala, it may be assumed that a number of children with affected parents are HIV positive.

HEALTH SERVICES

There are 9 health centres in the district. However while the main island, Bugala, has 4, each sub-county has only one. Thus one health centre serves 10 to 12 islands. Health workers endeavour to visit outlying landing sites once a month to carry out immunization and some ante-natal care. This will depend on the availability of transport and the weather. Cases beyond the capacity of the small health centres are referred to one of the two county health centres or to a hospital on the mainland. There are no hospitals in the district. Transportation of patients also depends on the availability of boats and the weather.

EDUCATION

The Government introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997 which has facilitated access to education for many children in the country. However Kalangala district has particular problems. Each sub-county has at least one primary school but while the main island (Bugala) has 11 and the second island (Bukasa) has 3, the remaining 61 islands have only 4 schools among them. There are no boarding facilities for primary schools and the distances are too great to allow daily travel. The 3 secondary schools on the two largest islands have boarding facilities but school fees are too high for most families. In practice only families with relatives living near schools either on other islands or the mainland are able to send their children to school. Other factors mitigating against daily inter-island travel are the high cost of fuel and the sudden storms and rough weather that frequently occur on the lake.

CHILDREN

Currently children make up 44% of the population in the district. The proportion of children going to school has increased since the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997. Despite this development, many of the district's children receive little formal education. There are a number of reasons for this, as described above. There is a high dropout rate for boys, who are required to help with the fishing, and for girls who help with domestic chores, cultivating and caring for younger siblings. Girls are particularly at risk. Some as young as 12 are to be found working in bars and a number become pregnant at an early age. According to the Police Child Protection Unit, there is a significant amount of child abuse and neglect. Children are commonly exposed to lifestyles of heavy drinking, domestic violence and promiscuity especially on the crowded landing sites which do not have the steadying influence of long-established communities and extended families.

ORPHANS

The number of orphans in the district has risen from 2% (1991 census) to 8% (Socio-economic Survey 2000) currently numbering 840 orphans i.e. children who have lost both parents. If children who have lost one parent are included, the number increases 2,270. The cause of death of parents is not given in the survey but nationally, most deaths of adults in the 16 – 40 age group result from AIDS. Traditionally orphans are cared for within the extended family system. However since most families have between 5 and 10 children, additional children into an already impoverished household is a considerable, burden. With the depletion of a generation of young adults the burden of care has fallen on grandparents who may be unable to generate any income. There are also a number of child-headed households. Both groups face extreme poverty.

NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs)

In response to the foregoing social economic problems, the Government has tried to provide interventions to alleviate the suffering of orphans. However the scale of the problem has overwhelmed the system and support from NGOs has been sought.

Although government policy favours the traditional system of care within the extended family, the current death rate among parents has created a large population of deprived children leading to the phenomenon of street children in all major urban centres throughout the country with attendant crime rates. Other children are looked after in households where they are treated as servants and are abused or neglected. Some policy makers have reversed their policy position and have established or promoted the establishment of children's homes.

Today there are a number of foreign-based and indigenous NGOs working with orphans, street children and other children in exceptional circumstances such as Watoto, SOS, New Hope and Tiger Club in Kampala and Childcare International in Kalangala. Most of these NGOs provide accommodation, food and healthcare, and access to education and counselling. Many have religious affiliations and some try to maintain contact with the child's home community though some children arrive as abandoned babies and the NGO becomes the child's only home. Other NGOs try to find foster homes. In Kalangala Childcare International is working with orphans from the main island (Bugala) and accommodates 120 children. It sponsors a further 500 children living in families. However there is not the capacity to take children from the outlying islands. ActionAid is working with local community-based organizations in capacity-building and training.

