

UGANDA

To Give Dignity To Street Children

Hundreds of children are begging in the streets of Kampala City. A-Comboni missionary, Father John Bosco Mubangizi has launched a project "Karamoja Streets Kids". It means - Respect, protection and a future for these children. He outlines this initiative.



For decades, the Karamoja region in the north-east of the country has been characterized by violent conflicts, high levels of poverty, semi-arid conditions and food insecurity. An estimated 82 per cent of the population live in extreme poverty. As a result, the area has been dependent on food aid and donor assistance for decades, with numerous emergency aid programmes.

To survive, many families in Karamoja have decided to send their children into urban centres hoping to get better opportunities. Most of those begging on the street in Kampala city are Karimojong children and youth.

Not everyone welcomes these street kids from Karamoja. They compete with and face resistance from the older street children and are subjected to caning, or their money is taken away from them. During the rainy season the leaking temporary structures in Katwe and Kisenyi, suburbs of Kampala, where they live are too crowded and they are supposed to contribute some money for this 'accommodation' despite the



poor hygiene. They suffer all kinds of diseases and no proper medical attention is offered to them. They are prone to accidents on the street since their main location is at traffic junctions where cars stop and where they can beg. They are often victims of motorcycle "hit and run" accidents and sometimes sustain fractures from these accidents without medical care. The worst happens when children simply disappear from the streets and are never seen again maybe because of the practice of child sacrifice by witch doctors. Sadly, these children are used as sex slaves, defiled and/or forced into prostitution. Many are impregnated, infected with HIV/Aids; there is a tremendous number of single mothers, aged 12-23 years old on the streets. Some child mothers can be seen on streets breast-feeding fellow children or carrying them on their backs.

I went to visit them

I met the Karimojong street children in Kampala in 2015, when I was still Parish Priest of Matany in Karamoja. One day on reaching Kampala Road in Kampala city near Diamond Trust

