

{feature}

Three CHILDREN At 18yrs

TOMORROW IS WORLD POPULATION DAY. UGANDAN WOMEN ARE HAVING CHILDREN AT A TIME WHEN THEY DO NOT INTEND TO. IN THE SECOND OF THREE-PART SERIES, **CAROL NATUKUNDA** DEMONSTRATES HOW THIS CREATES A DEPENDENCY DILEMMA

On the morning *New Vision* journalists visited, it had rained a few hours earlier and the compound was water-logged. Betty Nantume was relieved that the sun was blazing. Inside her house, however, was pitch black. A dirty woollen, evidently soggy, carpet covered the earthen floor.

"We all lie here and catch sleep. Everyone, my children, granny, nieces and nephews," Nantume said, as the children giggled.

It must have once been a modern brick house. There were two tiny rooms in the vicinity, which perhaps were once bathrooms. The broken window panes had been replaced with wood nailed into the wall. The wall was decorated with dirty brown patches and moulds, an indication of the perpetual floods.

President Yoweri Museveni's 2016 yellow campaign poster hanged inside the house like a guardian angel. It read: "Steady progress", a sharp contrast to the slum life.

Tough life

On a rainy night, Nantume tucks her children up in the ceiling, worried that the floods might fill up her two-room house in a wetland in Bwaise-Nabweru slum, Kampala and drown them.

"I use ropes to tie a mattress up there," Nantume says, pointing to the dirty brown ropes hanging from the timber. "Sometimes, I make cloth swings, where I make them sit until daybreak."

"I stay up worrying about the floods. This is where I stand when the floods gush in," she says, pointing at a dirty table in a corner. "If the rains fall during the day, we seek shelter elsewhere."

Nantume's story

Yet, this is the safest abode for this 18-year-old mother of three children; aged five, three and nine months. A primary school dropout, Nantume had her first child at 13.

She was raised by a single mother, who always struggled to put food on the table. "Mummy would do all sorts of petty jobs to keep us going. Our dad was long dead. I am the ninth of 10

IN HER WORDS
WHEN HE DEMANDED
FOR SEX, I SAID 'YES'
AND SHORTLY IT WAS
DISCOVERED THAT I
WAS PREGNANT. I WAS
IN PRIMARY FIVE.



BETTY NANTUME WITH HER THREE CHILDREN

IN HER RUNDOWN HOUSE IN THE SLUMS OF BWAISE-NABWERU. SHE HAD HER FIRST CHILD AT 13 YEARS

children," recounts Nantume.

A man in the neighbourhood seemed particularly kind, giving her gifts. "When he demanded for sex, I said 'yes' and shortly it was discovered I was pregnant. I was in Primary Five. My mother was angry with me for disappointing her, let alone the fact that she could barely support us, and here I was carrying a child. I have not seen the man who got me pregnant since," she recounts.

Unable to stand her mother's wrath, Nantume sought refuge with her grandmother, Nnalongo Samali Ndawula, in Bwaise-Nabweru slum.

However, while her first pregnancy should have served as a lesson, Nantume has since given birth to two more children, whose fathers she claims she does not know their whereabouts.

As Nantume talks, her baby becomes irritable. Although he is nine months old, he looks like he is only six months old.

"He is sick. You can see the skin rash," she says, edging forward to breastfeed him. It is evident from the manner in which the baby pulls at her sagging breast that she has inadequate breast milk. "We eat once a day. We are too many in this house," she laments.

A vicious cycle

Nantume lives in fear that her two daughters could turn out just like her, creating a vicious cycle of teen age mothers in her family. She is worried that living in a slum, where commercial sex thrives unabated, someone might already have taken the girls' innocence.

"If they also give birth by 13 like me, they will live with me here," she says.

Her eldest daughter has started kindergarten. However, without a steady income, she is not sure how much longer she will keep her in school. "When I get odd jobs like cleaning, I use the money to buy food."

So why doesn't she stop having more children?

"I conceive in the hope that the man will be happy and stay with me," she says, looking down.

"I do not know details about my lovers, like where they come from. They are friendly, give me money and then disappear," Nantume laments.

Isn't she worried about contracting HIV? She looks away. What about contraceptives?

"I do not know those things," Nantume says, her voice barely audible.

Dependency dilemma

Nantume and her children depend on her grandmother, who has many other children to care for.

Ndawula says she built this now beaten-down house in 1987. "Buying land in a wetland is cheap. People tell us to move, but where will we go?" she says.

That Ndawula is a great-grandmother at just 60, demonstrates the possibility that she too had children at young age; and so have her children and grandchildren.

"I do not count children under my roof. They come with blessings," Ndawula chuckles, feeding tiny multi-coloured beads onto a string. This is what she does for a living. She sells each bracelet at sh3,000.

13

BETTY NANTUME HAD
HER FIRST CHILD AT
THE AGE OF 13. SHE
WAS LURED INTO SEX
BY A MAN IN HER
NEIGHBORHOOD

Children having babies

GRAPHICS BY BRIAN SEKAMATTE

"Whatever little money I get is what we share," Ndawula says. She says she also relies on hand-outs from charities and good Samaritans.

Experts speak

According to the 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS), one in four Ugandan girls aged 15-19 are already mothers or pregnant with their first child. The country's population stands at 34.9 million, according to the 2014 Housing and Population Census.

With a population growth rate of 3%, Uganda's population is projected to hit 47 million by 2025.

Almost half of the population is below 15, typically dependents. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) states that Uganda's dependency ratio is 103, that is, there are 103 dependents per 100 working age adults.

With a 28% teenage pregnancy rate and a 5.4 fertility rate, the dependency ratios will continue to surge, a factor that experts warn could become a stumbling block to the economy.

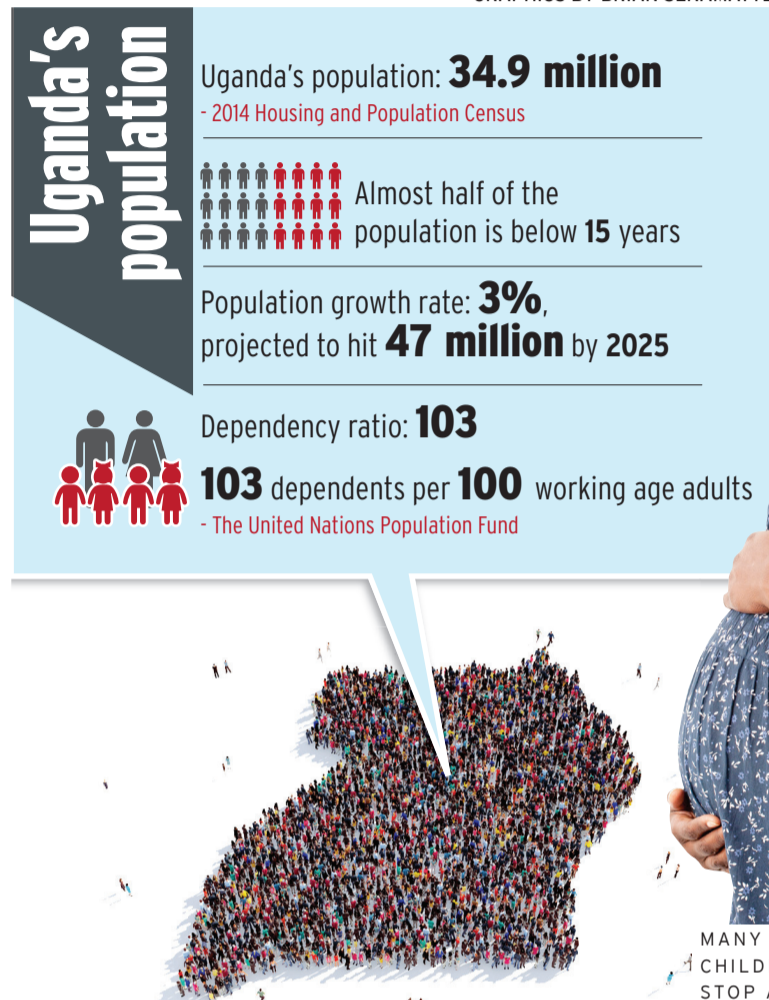
"Teenage dependents give birth to children who will also produce more children, further multiplying the dependency," observes Syrrill Kizza, the founder of Vision for Vulnerable Communities Charity in Bwaise-Nabweru slum.

FP2020 (FAMILY PLANNING 2020) IS A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP THAT ADVOCATES FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS TO DECIDE WHEN AND HOW MANY CHILDREN THEY DESIRE TO HAVE. TOMORROW, FIND ABOUT UGANDA'S PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING IN THE LAST PART OF SERIES TOMORROW.

"This means that a great-grandparent like Ndawula has to about four generations she is looking after. She will not work to improve herself or have some savings, yet she also needs care as she ages," explains Kizza.

Born in an impoverished big family, with an absentee father who was a truck driver, Kizza recounts seeing his mother struggle to raise them.

"Mum used to do laundry for the elite families, where she would get money for food. It was hard. A school uniform was a luxury and I was always hungry," Kizza recalls. He says as he grew older, he started to collect scrap metals, which he sold to buy scholastic materials.



MANY TEENAGERS ARE HAVING CHILDREN AND CONSEQUENTLY STOP ATTENDING SCHOOL

"Life worsened when our mother died. Most of my siblings dropped out of school. For the girls, once they got pregnant, that was the end," he says.

UNFPA states that the lifetime opportunity cost related to adolescent pregnancy — measured by the young mother's foregone annual income over her lifetime — amounts to 30% of the annual of Gross Domestic Product in Uganda.

The HIV prevalence among young people aged 15-24 is 2.1%, with young women having a burden of disease more than three times higher than young men (3.3%).

Education key

Hope Nankunda, the founder and team leader of Raising Teenagers Uganda, says a much greater impact on population growth would be by delaying childbearing among young people.

She believes that keeping the girls in school would make a difference in helping them take charge of their lives.

"We need to keep our girls in school. We

need to have initiatives to support them and encourage their parents to treasure education. It should never mean the end of education when a teenage girl gets pregnant.

"Once she gives birth, it is important for parents of the girl to be supportive. Education is the only weapon we can use to change this world," Nankunda says.

She adds that young people need to be informed about the dangers of early pregnancy and how to avoid it.

"This involves providing guidance and counselling to the students, as well as encouraging parents to create time and talk to their daughters about the dangers of early sex," she says.

"This knowledge will help them advance in their education and open opportunities for training and employment," says Nankunda.

Jessica Katumba, a retired midwife and volunteer at Reproductive Health Uganda clinic in Mityana, Kampala, says it is critical to invest in the reproductive health of young people.

"We can counsel them, but youth need to know about birth control to curb unwanted pregnancies. Why have five, eight, 10 children if you cannot look after them?" Katumba asks.

The United Nations population projections show that fertility is expected to decrease more significantly over the next decade. Uganda 2030 projections show a narrowing at the bottom of the pyramid, based on the assumption that total fertility rate will decline to 4.4 children per woman over her lifespan.

The Uganda 2050 pyramid shows a more noticeable narrowing of the base of the population pyramid, based on the assumption that fertility will decline further to 3.1 children per woman. In this 2050 scenario, Uganda would have a larger proportion of the population working-age and, if able to secure employment, able to contribute to economic growth.

editor's letter

When babies have babies

Every time a girl gets pregnant, her ability to achieve full potential is curtailed. She becomes vulnerable and when she gives birth, the burden of parenting the child falls on her family.

Research shows that an unempowered woman is likely to struggle to empower her offspring, continuing the vicious cycle of vulnerability.

This year's World Population Day under the theme, *Family Planning is a human right*, is a reminder that all girls need to be safeguarded to enable them achieve their full potential. Young girls have fallen prey to men who take advantage of their gullibility. It is time to empower young people to take charge of their sexual and reproductive health. As a country, we cannot continue to watch as young girls miss out on their teenage years. Most importantly, they need to be educated into responsible adults, capable of determining their own destiny.

Her Vision Team

Teenage pregnancy in Uganda

Pregnancy rate: **28%**

Lifetime opportunity cost related to adolescent pregnancy: **30%** Of the country's annual GDP - UNFPA

One in four Ugandan girls aged 15-19 are already mothers or pregnant with their first child
- 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS)

who we are

HerVision is published by New Vision and is distributed free every Tuesday by New Vision

SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

Facebook at Hervision
Email hervision@newvision.co.ug
Phone us at 0414337000