

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

## **The Change I Want to Make**

(Original)

*Otim Nicholas Ojara*

*(Age 24, Uganda)*

Human beings are complicated creatures to handle, and in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, children behave like adults and vice versa. Character and attitude varies from person to person with few role models to look upon. Drunkenness is the order of the day. Drink to get drunk is their motto because if you are not drunk, you have wasted money for nothing. Young girls befriend old men hoping for materialistic while young boys goes for sugar mummies expecting delicacy.

Two decades down the road, northern Uganda suffered terribly in the hands of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and during that period, innocent lives perished. Young and old people lost their legs, arms, ears, hands, breasts, lips among others because they were cutoff. People abandoned their homes and land. They ran to the refugee camps, where free basic needs were donated to them by various international agencies for humanity.

At the camps, hundreds of today's youth were conceived, delivered and brought up under such psychological, economical and tragic situation. People lived in hardship. Many economic activities were brought to a standstill. People lost their property and they depended on donations.

When the barrel of guns stopped, peace came in, resettlement started and afterwards, a deadly disease, a life threatening monster called 'dependency syndrome' hopped in. An attitude and a belief that an individual or group cannot solve its own problem without help. The disease which has blind folded the young and the old. It's a disease I would like to prevent and eliminate because it kills creativity, innovation and the spirit of self-reliance, making young people vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation.

Now that most international agencies and the Non-Governmental Organizations has withdrawn from the area, other people still think they are in the camp, some young people think they don't have to work for money or food. They despise Agriculture saying it is for the poor, not knowing it's a wide branch of science with many professions. A man, who is the head of the household ignorantly, tells the sanitation committee that he has not dug his

pit latrine because the tools they gave them from the camp is lost or damaged. 'I have not planted beans or maize this year because the governments have not given me the seeds. These and many more are the complaints you hear in the community.

One cannot afford a packet of seeds but gets drunk daily. Young boys roam in town doing nothing, yet they have hectares of redundant fertile land in their villages. They want quick money and things on a silver plate. The little money they get is wasted on sport betting, gambling and night clubbing. When things get worst, they resort to drug and substance abuse, crime and illicit sex. The girls say, 'use what you have to get what you don't have' thereby, going for transactional sex which exposes them to a number of challenges such as; Sexually Transmitted Diseases, teenage pregnancies, child marriages, school dropout among others.

Observing all these, I felt there was a role I could play to help in leveling the loopholes of negative perception and dependency among young people. I realized there was need for awareness creation. I started a peer to peer dialogue with the young people and later, I registered my Community Based Organization three years ago with the intention of creating and promoting awareness on social and health issues affecting young people at schools and the community.

I with my team formed a drama group. Drama is helping us in creating awareness on a number of issues which affects the community such as; Sexual and Gender Based Violence, drug and substance abuse, conflict resolution, corruption to mention but a few. These are achieved through organizing community and school outreaches.

Following the above, we are soon registering another organization HEPA-Uganda that is, 'Health Education and Promotion Alliance Uganda.' A multi-sectorial youth led organization with the aim of empowering young people on Behavioral Change Communication, livelihood and skill development, Sexual Reproductive Health and Right, HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

Through partnership, networking and continuous advocacy, dependency syndrome and its consequences on young people and the community can easily be tackled.