

A presentation by Alibankoha John, Director of Rural People in Action for Development (RUPAD) on the current situation in Uganda, the role of TVET in development and the work of RUPAD

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I greet you all most warmly. I'm glad that I have the opportunity to say, first of all words of thanks to Tools For Solidarity (TFS) for inviting me for a visit on one hand but also for giving me an opportunity to address all of you.

I cherish the role TFS has played and equally appreciate, as always their kind gesture for the continued support they have given to rural artisans and vocational institutions in Uganda. The need for their services of collecting, refurbishing and accessing good-quality tools to people in Africa is enormous and should be further supported.

I will now embark on the three major aspects that form my presentation.

Current situation in Uganda

The role of vocational technical education in development

The work of Rural People in Action for Development (RUPAD)

1.Current situation in Uganda

The current situation in Uganda can best be grouped into two different aspects; political and socio-economical dimensions.

Political dimension

The political situation in Uganda has been rough since its independence from Britain in 1962. In 1971-1979 the dictatorial regime of Idi Amin was responsible for the death of over 300 000 opponents, and from 1980-85 guerilla war was launched and human rights abuses under military Obote II claimed another 100 000 lives.

In 1986 when President Museveni came to power, relative peace was registered and since then, Uganda thought a new path to repair the poor reputation the country had registered, by denouncing human rights violations and rebuilding respect for democracy and good governance as well as the rights of the people. These violations included breaches of rule of law and excessive abuse of power committed against persons in Uganda by regimes in the government, their servants, agents and agencies.

The current government came up with legal frame work that restored the rule of law through established of state institutions. It was the hope of every one that

the peace attained could be sustained but currently we can see a slide which has caused worry to most people.

There is a slide towards violation of democracy and rule of law. The current president Lt. Gen. Yoweri Museveni who seized in power in 1986 has since maintained grip/control over power.

In Uganda there are many political organizations and although they are allowed to sponsor candidates during elections. Their political ground is not levelled. Elections have been marred by violence, vote rigging and bribing voters. This has left fear and anxiety about the political future of our country. The electoral commission has not served as credible electoral management body in which all people can have trust and confidence in organizing and managing free and fair elections.

The right to organize and participate in peaceful demonstrations and particularly by other political parties has been infringed on. Police and demonstrators are always in running battles almost daily in Kampala even where it is uncalled for.

The constitution was amended to lift the presidential term limit which opposition activists and other people saw as a project of giving president Museveni a live-time presidency.

The same president is right now luring parliament to pass yet another bill to create a new law that we'll see protesters being denied bail for six month and if such a law is inacted, it will seen by political activists and other human right bodies as intended to crack down other political part activities. Besides, people say it will be prejudice of the Ugandan judicial system by judging people before they are found guilty in competent courts law.

There has been increased crack down on journalists and other media practitioners which has been widely criticized as violation of media and press freedoms.

As a result of some of the above and many other notwithstanding, demonstrations against the government organised by oposition politicians has become the order of the day especially in Kampala and other urban centres. This has resulted in yet many cases of death, imprisonment of protesters, loss of proprtey and fear among the population.

People have worry that peaceful transfer of power by the current regime is far and unpredictable and this may lead yet to another civil strike.

Social Economic Dimension

Uganda's economy is predominantly agro based. Agriculture contributes atleast 51% of GDP. It contributes almost 90% of Export earnings and employs 80% of the labour force. Industry contributes around 10% and manufacturing 4%.

Since 1997 there has been a an annual growth rate of 6.9%, a rise in educational enrollment from 60% to 80% and decrease in infant and maternal- mortality rates. This was very commendable uptil most recent.

Although we have had a steady rise in our economic growth, since the general elections of 2011 the country has registered the highest rate of inflation from around 7% to 21%. This has been attribtuted to many factors including; poor monetary management, corruption,poor management of the economy, which has more than tripled the rate of unemployment in the country. Poor marketing of agricultural products has also led to over exploitation of the farmers by the middle men, a fact that has led to persistent poverty among the majority Ugandans . Today unlike in other countries farming (actually peasantry) is synonymous with poverty. There are also little efforts registered to add value to farmers products.

Coupled to the above is the increasing cost of living due to inflation a fact that has culminated into several demonstrations in Kampala. Opposition politicians have as earlier mentioned organised demonstrations protesting against high prices of essential commodities like sugar,soap,fuel,food etc..

Currently,some people as a way drawing attention of the government and as a form of protest,they are walking to work,hooting and biting drums at specific agreed times.

HIV/AIDS.

Although HIV/AIDS prevailence is still high, there has been effective education compaigns which has contributed to the decline in the number of people living with HIV/AIDS. Since the 1990,s the government has intensified its programmes on voluntary testing and counseling and provision of free antiretrital drugs. To date at least 1.2 million people are estimated to be living with HIV/AIDs which includes at least 150,000 children. Over 1.2 million children have been orphaned by this epidemic.

Education.

Since the introduction of free and universal primary education in 1997,many,pupils have been able to go to school. Secondary and technical education is also free. There efforts to enable those students from poor families who want to join universities access long term loans which they can pay after their studies.

2-The Role of Vocational Technical Education in Development

Vocational and technical training has proven to be helpful in addressing the needs of young people and communities in developing a culture of life long learning, which fosters sustainability in the long term. Vocational training has been viewed as a productive means of dealing with rapid change in the social economic context by actively pursuing initiatives including securing employment,

developing skills and creating viable enterprises that provides greater security and potential for self reliance.

Rising unemployment, lack of skilled workers, high school drop outlets and changing demographic nature of the worker force places the issue of practical education high.

Vocational education should be linked to the needs of the present labour market. To give an example half of the Uganda's population is young than 15 years old. The potential labour force of 15 million Ugandans increases annually by about 3%. Every year, about 800,000 graduates from primary and secondary schools, enter the labour market, of which only 5-10% obtain vocational training.

Our traditional education system focuses more on producing job seekers rather than job makers.

Most parents think that technical education is for the poor and academically weak, this way of thinking has condemned millions of youth to a life of misery and failure because of unemployment.

Of course, there are challenges in supporting/starting vocational training centre because of the huge costs involved, but its outcome sumammounts the threats of input but also creates economic sustainability.

The government of Uganda has made efforts in trying to start community polytechnics at subcounty level which has been widely seen as a welcome gesture in the education reform programme.

Support from charities like tools and other educational materials registered under UGAPPRIV are exempted from import duties as way of boosting technical education.

It is on this regard that we would like to appreciate further the work of TFS and other such organisations who are trying to support technical training. There should be efforts aimed at providing an all rounded quality formal and practical education that equips under privileged students with life skills which will enable them to live their dreams, believe in themselves and to take charge of their destiny.

3. RURAL PEOPLE IN ACTION FOR DEVELOPMENT-RUPAD

Mission Statement- The people of Kibaale and Uganda in general understand that they are key to their own development and participate in their own community transformation.

RUPAD has seven areas of strategic intervention through which we can achieve community transformation of the rural areas. These are:-

- 1- **Gender, Human Rights and Appropriate Technology**. Unlike other societies, most of Africa is patriarchal i.e. they believe in men doing everything and men superiority. Women as a result do not know their rights and do not participate in economic activities. This has made them extremely poor and left them with no capacity to participate. Lack of participation makes them very vulnerable to all forms of injustice. We train the women in energy saving technology to save them from the burden of smoke from firewood, dangers of harassing the environment and risks of rape and defilement which are so common as women move into forests alone..
- 2- **Vocational skills training**. Under this component we train vulnerable groups like girls out of school, women, orphans and other disadvantaged groups in Tailoring, carpentry and joinery. The objective is to create skills among these groups for self reliance and for sustaining their households in a world that has become increasingly commercial.

3-Environmental protection. There is great danger ahead as no respect is given to the protection of biodiversity in Uganda. Forests are daily disappearing.(Refer to the mabira issue in Uganda). RUPAD trains apprentices in vocational skills after graduating them they require inputs from the environment like timber. It is therefore our moral obligation as a development organisation to teach people and support them to protect the environment. The objective is to protect the environment for the future generation.

4-Nutrition and Agrarian production. More than 95% of the people in Uganda are employed in the agriculture sector. But it is surprising that many people go without meals. In Africa today millions of people for example in Somalia, Kenya, south Sudan e.t.c are dying due to lack of food. This is because the food they produce is not enough for both home consumption and market. Communities must sell what they produce to buy basic necessities and drugs. The key objective of this intervention is to increase the availability of food and increase the yield to produce enough surplus for market

5-Enterprise Development. Farming in Uganda is synonymous with poverty. It is a poor venture due to poor quality products and less improved varieties therefore less competition on the international market. Agriculture employs most people and this explains wide rampant poverty especially in the rural areas. The burden of diseases increases the poverty syndrome. RUPAD looks at strengthening RURAL homes through encouraging income generating activities at household level and supporting selected members of households with educational training especially vocational.

6-HIV/AIDS and Rural Health Training. Since HIV/AIDS was discovered in Uganda in 1981, it has remained a threat and calamity claiming millions of people's lives. The Anti Retral viral Drugs (ARVS) are not accessible to patients especially in rural areas and even then very scarce. RUPAD trains rural communities in HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support. A small drug shop was established aimed at increasing access to HIV/AIDS voluntary testing and counselling. RUPAD also train rural communities in basic health and Hygiene practices.

7-Lobbying and Advocacy RUPAD like other civil societies in Uganda advocate for fair and friendly policies and lobbying for enactment of fair laws. The rights of every one and the creation of an environment which makes the world a better place for every one. Today many policies infringe on the rights of minority groups. For example few girls go to school compared to boys, the countries large forest reserve of Mabira is being surrendered for destruction amidst wide spread opposition from the environmentalists and civil societies e.t.c.

CHALLENGES.

There are many challenges as we implement these interventions. Below are some of them:-

- 1-Lack of enough tools for our graduates when they complete their training.
- 2-Lack of accommodation in form of Boys hostel to accommodate them.
- 3-Lack of funds to purchase in puts for our beneficiaries under nutrition and agrarian production
- 4-Lack of funds to put up a health centre for the support of HIV/AIDS and Rural health training.
- 5- Lack of funds to enhance our environmental project which promotes tree planting to protect the environment..

Currently,we are seriously affected by lack of proper accommodation for the boys and we are currently looking forward for any support towards this noble cause.

I thank you very much.