SYNOPSIS :   INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY 2018

THEME   :   "SAFE SPACES FOR YOUTH"

The International youth Day (IYD)
Every year on the 12th of August, Uganda joins the rest of the world in the commemoration of International Youth Day. IYD is an awareness day designated by the United Nations in 1999 with the adoption of Resolution 54/120. The Day provides an opportunity for government and other stakeholders to take stock of accomplishments in the journey of youth empowerment and to draw attention to youth issues worldwide.

This year, the government of Uganda through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development will launch the Uganda Green Incubation Program (UGIP), Songhai Model pilot project at Kampiringisa.

The National Celebrations for this year will be held at Kampiringisa National Rehabilitation Centre in Mpigi District, under **the theme**: **"Safe Spaces for Youth".**

The theme
Safe Spaces for Youth is the theme that was selected for this year, with input from youth organizations and members of the UN Inter-Agency Network in Youth Development.
Youth need safe spaces where they can come together, engage in activities related to their diverse needs and interests, participate in decision making processes and freely express themselves. While there are many types of spaces, safe spaces ensure the dignity, safety and personal development of a youth.

Safe Spaces
The term safe space refers to an autonomous space created for individuals who feel marginalized to come together to communicate their experiences and expectations.

We need to ensure free and safe spaces, where young people can meaningfully engage with local, national and global decision-making processes with a strong focus on the principles of diversity and inclusion.
The United Nations highlight Civic Space as most important. This is where individuals and groups are able to freely, effectively and without discrimination exercise their basic civil rights, to enable them to undertake free and voluntary action in order to advance socially-relevant goals.
It is noted that while ensuring that safe spaces are inclusive, youth from diverse backgrounds need to be assured of respect and self-worth. When youth have safe spaces to engage, they can effectively contribute to development, including peace and social cohesion for positive youth development.

It is evident that more youth are growing in a technologically connected world, their aspirations to engage in political, civic and social matters, the availability and accessibility of safe spaces becomes even more crucial to make this a reality.

It is also important for the youth to know that safety begins with each one of them. The youth should take precaution about their lives and not to venture into unsafe spaces that may otherwise harm them and others.

To be secure you need discipline like Brian Tracy says

> *"Discipline yourself to do what you know is right and important although difficult, is the high road to pride self-esteem personal satisfaction and safety"*

For every disciplined effort there is a multiple reward.

As a country we are zealous to see happy youth enjoying the safe spaces that are provided in the political arena, economic opportunities, and social activities including spaces for recreation activities. Our youth must take advantage of such spaces but with caution like Arnest Dimnet points out;

> *"The Happiness of most people we know is not ruined by great catastrophes or fatal errors but by the repetition of slowly destructive things"*

The end of the day we need to see a generation of young people that truly respect each other and have a sense of self-respect. Abraham Joshua Heschel leading Jewish theologists of the 20th century observed that;

> *"Self-respect is the fruit of fruit or discipline, and the senses of self-restrain and not to be driven by the peer influence"*

Young people must be tough on themselves. Zigler Zigler says;
"When you are tough on yourself, life is going to be infinitely easier on you"
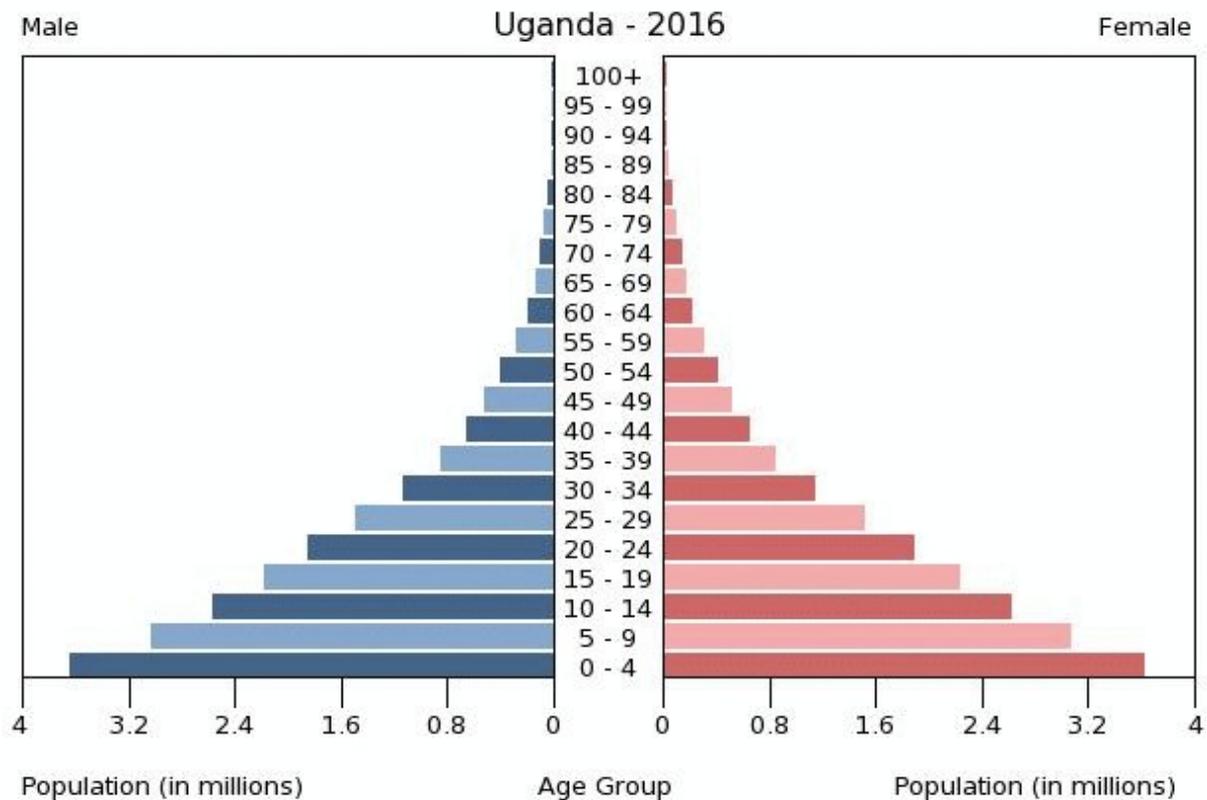
The Youth Bulge and demographic dividend
Uganda's population is projected to grow exponentially from 40 million in 2015 to 141.2 million by 2060. The youth population (18-30 years) currently constitutes a significant proportion of Uganda population (22.5%) Uganda is one of the 10 countries projected to collectively account for more than half of the world's projected population increase over a period of 2017-2050.

The youth bulge has been defined by eminent scholars as a temporary demographic phenomenon which occurs when child mortality declines and fertility falls rapidly so that the previous cohort of birth is larger than subsequent cohorts.

As the large cohorts of birth move into the working ages (usually defined as 15 – 64 years of 20-64 years), we get a bulge in the population pyramid and an increase in the ratio of working age population relatively to young dependants.

The Uganda population pyramid 2016

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According to the East African regional Analysis of Youth Demographics, to attain the Youth Bulge and Demographic Dividend, through in investment in the youth, there is need for Policy, legislation and investment actions intended to stimulate socio-economic development in the areas of Human capital development (Education, Skills development, Family planning and health), Economic empowerment, entrepreneurship and job creation and equitable access to available jobs(focusing on youth), investment in Basic and social services (housing, schools), Good governance and Accountability, Women empowerment as well as investment in environmental and climate change.

The government is committed to Harnessing the Demographic Dividend as defined in the Vision 20140 a development strategy to achieve this goal.

Spaces in Policy and planning Frameworks
Whereas the Uganda National Youth Policy provides an appropriate framework for enabling youth to develop as well as highlights Safe Spaces for Youth in areas of Health, Education and Training, Agriculture, Environment, Culture, Sports and Recreation , and Youth Participation;

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically Goal 11, emphasizes the need for provision of space towards inclusive and sustainable urbanization;

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) the UN framework for youth development prioritizes the provision of "leisure activities" as essential to the psychological, cognitive and physical development of young people and;

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) recaps the need for public spaces for youth to enable them to interact with family and have constructive inter-generational dialogue.

The 9th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting also identified the need to professionalise Youth Work, where the youth service providers deliver professional youth services in the work space for youth that is free of abuse and unfairness.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018 resolutions on Gender Equality and Inclusion encouraged member countries and Commonwealth bodies to have actions that prevent and eliminate sexual and gender-based violence; child, early and forced marriage; and female genital mutilation as barriers to the development and the full realisation of girls' and women's human rights and safety.

The Crucial Safe Spaces for the Youth

The features of settings where youth spend their time have been found to decisively impact on their development. The status of safe spaces for youth in different sectors in Uganda generally require further enhancement. Such crucial spaces include;

Civic spaces, Public spaces, Digital spaces, Physical spaces, Health spaces Environmental spaces, Safety spaces, Education spaces, Physical and psychological safety, Supportive relationships, Leisure, Opportunities to belong, Economic development spaces, Work spaces Family and Community spaces

All these spaces are critical for the holistic development and young people in these spaces complement each other and are therefore interdependent. It is a duty of each one of us to ensure existence of safe spaces.

Our dream
A nation where the Youth have,
1. Youth friendly services at all Health facilities and are able to freely access the right information without the fear of being judged;
2. The opportunity to participate in sports and other leisure activities in the community;

3. Safe spaces to enable them to interact with family and have constructive inter-generational dialogue;
4. Supportive systems like the National youth service program to support young people learn and practise new skills and receive constructive feedback, attitude, entrepreneurship, apprenticeships and mentorship
5. ICT enabling space that provide youth with an opportunity to interact virtually across borders with everyone;
6. Practices that increase safe peer group interaction and decrease unsafe or confrontational peer interactions, supportive relationships, closeness, connectedness, secure attachment and care;
7. Social inclusion, social engagement and integration, opportunities for sociocultural identity formation, support for cultural and bicultural competence;
8. Youth participation approaches that support autonomy and increases empowerment and enable youth to engage in governance issues and decision making.
9. Enabling sensitive sectors that underpin growth and increase youth employment opportunities;
10. Safe spaces where Sexual Reproductive Health issues, and gender-based violence; child, early and forced marriage, as barriers to the development are eliminated.

The provision of a Safe Space for the Youth is thus an essential component for effective youth development. Such space requires special attention to a variety of contextual program activities so that no single youth is left behind.

It is the duty of you and me, the youth, indeed the duty of everyone to ensure safe spaces for the youth a number one priority in the development process. We should never forget that peace, security and safety are the tree most important ingredients for development and social economic transformation.