

The Project of Moroto Diocese Against Alcoholism in Karamoja (Uganda) in the Year 2023

Divina Musimire¹, Pier Luigi Rossanigo^{2*} and Mark Aol M³

¹Diocesan Health Coordinator, Moroto Diocese Health Department Team, Uganda

²Diocesan Health Advisor, Moroto Diocese Health Department Team, Uganda

³Advocacy and Policy Influencing Officer, Moroto Diocese Health Department Team, Uganda

***Corresponding Author:** Pier Luigi Rossanigo, Diocesan Health Advisor, Moroto Diocese Health Department Team, Uganda.

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Abstract

The sub-region of Karamoja has the highest percentage of alcohol consumers in Uganda. The Diocese of Moroto, in Karamoja, started implementing a project against alcoholism. The method is to collect evidence based data on alcohol abuse, to do sensitisation of the communities, and to perform advocacy and policy influencing with the local authorities. There is also a component of rehabilitation of alcoholics. Although presently it is difficult to propose solutions to the problem of alcohol abuse, the results of the general approach of Moroto Diocese look encouraging.

Keywords: Uganda; Alcohol; Moroto Diocese

Introduction

Karamoja sub-region, located in North-Eastern Uganda, successfully emerged in recent years from decades of insecurity mainly due to cattle rustling. Thereafter, the sub-region started to experience a fast-growing economy with improved transport and communication networks, which brought about booming trade with several mining companies commencing exploration and exploitation of mineral resources. Unfortunately, the increased access to the sub-region paved the way for lucrative businesses, like the one of crude "waragi" (spirit), and so in the last 10 years the sub-region started experiencing a dramatic increase in alcohol consumption. Alcoholism is a chronic disease characterised by excessive drinking of alcohol which interferes with people's health, relations, work. It is now the most evident and striking problem

affecting the local community and development initiatives in the area. Moroto Diocese got concerned about people's health and took the first step in the fight against abuse of the imported liquor. Using the Diocesan Health Department and the Diocesan "Justice and Peace Structures", Moroto Diocese has been implementing the project entitled "Fighting the plague of alcoholism in Karamoja", financed by the Embassy of Ireland.

Over the years, the Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) reports have been ranking Karamoja as number one in alcohol consumption countrywide. In the UNHS reports of 2016/17 and 2019/2020, the national alcohol consumption rates stood at 17% and 12% respectively, meanwhile Karamoja rates in 2019/2020 stood at 47.8%, the highest in the Country. This gloomy picture

Figure 1

about Karamoja raises the need and gives ample justification for adopting possible solutions to save the affected population. Moroto Diocese, established in 1965, is the oldest catholic Diocese in the Karamoja sub-region covering five administrative Districts. The second catholic Diocese in Karamoja, curved out of Moroto Diocese in 1991, is Kotido Diocese, covering four administrative Districts. The two Dioceses mentioned above cover all the nine Districts of Karamoja sub-region.

Problem statement

Alcohol abuse in Karamoja started about ten years back and it is now wide spread in the local “Karimojong” society. This came about when people changed from consuming locally made brew to taking crude alcohol/liquor distilled from sugar molasses and produced outside Karamoja. The local brew, which is a fermentation made from cereals flour, has a low alcoholic content of 4 to 6% compared to crude alcohol distilled illegally from molasses, which has a high alcoholic percentage of 40% and above, and contains also a poison called “methanol”.

This drink is therefore extremely dangerous for the health of people, causing especially liver diseases and mental illnesses, malnutrition, and deaths. It is also having negative social aspects since it is responsible for insecurity, raids and killing, housebreaking, increasing violence in households, rape, defilement, indiscipline in schools, and irresponsible youth’s lifestyle.

Generally, it leads to unproductive way of living and is a very serious obstacle to the sustainable development of Karamoja.

This alcohol has no boundaries, since it is widely consumed by all categories in the population including adult men and women, youth, rural and urban people, literate and illiterate, employed and unemployed, and is also given to infants. According to the law of Uganda (“Enguli Act” of 1967), this distilled drink is illegal, since it contains poison and is not subjected to taxation, and it is only saleable to registered distilleries for proper processing. Unfortunately, most articles in the current law are outdated, so the Police and judiciary cannot properly enforce the Act because the charges stipulated in it are also outdated and low, and remain largely affordable to culprits.

Besides, there is also low political will among the local politicians who sometimes use to give alcohol to their voters.

Reducing alcohol abuse requires a strong effort to empower the communities with proper information to produce a great mindset change. It has to be a gradual process because there is need of dealing with a high number of rural and often illiterate people.

Evidence based data

Moroto Diocese started collecting data from Government documents.

The official data from the Ministry of Health, recorded in the District Health Information System (DHIS), show a dramatic increase in Karamoja from Financial Year 2014-15 in the number of Outpatients treated for alcohol abuse, in the number of mental illnesses related to alcohol, in the cases of deaths caused by alcohol, and in the reports of gender-based violence. The situation is still alarming.

The project

The Diocesan Project in 2023 is in the third year of implementation, and involves Moroto and Kotido Diocese. The general objective is to deepen the fight against the plague of alcoholism to the grassroots so as to reduce its effects in Karamoja.

The main components are: 1) Community sensitization and dialogues, 2) Therapy and Rehabilitation, 3) Advocacy and Policy influencing.

The sensitization involves awareness campaigns and capacity building through community dialogues. There are also interventions in five Schools in Moroto Diocese and one School in Kotido.

The Therapy and Rehabilitation component aims at the consolidation of the existing Alcoholics Anonymous Groups in Moroto and Kotido Dioceses, and includes the innovation of introducing the Sobriety Clubs for recovered alcoholics. The Advocacy and Policy influencing component means to work with District Authorities and especially with lower administrative leaders through dialogue meetings conducted at Sub-county, Parish and Village levels, in selected Subcounties. Data collection continues on alcohol related cases, deaths, and violence.

Achievements

Results attained include increased awareness of the problem due to wide sensitization of the leadership and communities who are gradually getting aware of the effects of alcohol abuse in their livelihoods. Ordinances and byelaws against crude alcohol were drafted in some Districts and Sub-counties. Three Villages after sensitization have decided to take action directly against crude alcohol. The Police and judiciary have helped to impound and dispose away a large amount of the illegally imported crude liquor in Karamoja. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups were established and made functional in eight areas of the sub-region, with a number of recovered alcoholics whose lives have positively changed. Data collected from Health Centres, Parish Development Committee members, and Village Health Teams indicate some improvement in the situation, although the problem remains widespread [1-7].

Conclusion

Alcohol is a silent killer, there is need to recognize that it is dangerous, and affecting a large part of the population in Karamoja, therefore it requires a tough fight against. It requires also determination, commitment, patience, and a long-term engagement. The Diocese of Moroto is ready for it, is working with other stakeholders to ensure proper coordination, and is determined to continue the struggle against alcohol abuse in Karamoja.

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