



# Taking Child Protection in The Media to The Next Level in Uganda

Background Paper and Dialogue Report

9<sup>th</sup> May, 2019

## Introduction

The liberalization of media in Uganda ushered a vibrant and dynamic media industry, covering divergent interests and views. This led to an astronomical increase in the number of electronic and print actors operating in Uganda's media space. By June 2018, Uganda had 292 licensed radio stations and 33 operational TV stations<sup>1</sup> as well as a number of newspapers, inevitably resulting to the plurality of content providers. The capacity of existing regulatory agencies - the Media Council of Uganda and Uganda Communications Commission to adequately protect children from harm and illegalities without stifling media creativity, ability to adopt rapidly changing and relevant digital innovations, trends and new synergies is uncertain. Evidently, operations of many media outlets are determined by commercial interests, including the desire to maximize profits<sup>2</sup>. This has got a bearing on child rights and child protection content, coverage and reporting. It has also significantly hampered investment in child sensitive training, research, quality production and reporting. There are concerns that children's media culture might gradually become thoroughly commercialized, the best interests of a child compromised, and the quality and quantity of "children's media" negotiated. This is partly because of the increasing dominance of private actors in the media space, which is threatening the existence and relevance of traditional public broadcasters that used to prioritize children. New communication technologies have brought enormous child rights and child protection opportunities, but they have also come along with new forms of criminality, including 'cybercrime.' Reports also highlight that although Uganda's legal and policy environment fosters child protection in the media, existing frameworks are largely unknown to most media practitioners, rendering journalistic output on child protection issues limited in breadth and depth<sup>3</sup>. According to UNICEF, although the media plays a critical role in raising public awareness of children's rights, they at times turn out to be ambiguous partners<sup>4</sup>.

Today, in a mediated world where everybody depends on the media for information and to make daily decisions on a range of aspects in everyday life, the media is also a potentially powerful partner in campaigns to improve the quality of life, and the welfare of people. The liberalized and digitized media goes far beyond the traditional roles of educating, providing information and entertaining people; it is an empowering tool in advocacy. In the child protection sector, the media industry has a crucial role to play in promoting children's rights through awareness and reporting abuse.

There is therefore need to increase awareness of a critical number of media professionals regarding child rights and child protection. There is also need to ensure that the media gets rid of harmful policies and works ethically and professionally. In addition, Uganda's media needs to resist commercial pressures that result to inadequate prioritization of children's issues; limited child participation, unfair coverage and compromise of child protection issues. It is against this backdrop that in May 2019, Save Street Children Uganda (SASCU) in conjunction with Uganda Parliamentary Forum for Children and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), organised a Media Dialogue captioned; "*The Role of the Media in Child Protection: Is the Media Doing Enough?*" The media dialogue is part of the broader interventions SASCU is undertaking to enhance the safeguarding of the rights of vulnerable children in Uganda. The dialogue involved a series of engagements with media and child rights practitioners, government officials and development partners.

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<sup>1</sup> Uganda Communications Commission, Post, Broadcasting and Telecommunications Market & Industry Q2 Report, 2018

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Network for Journalists-Uganda (2012): MEDIA in Uganda: Threatening Journalists' Rights and Freedoms

<sup>3</sup> Panos Eastern Africa (2013), The Role of Media in Child Protection: Challenges and Opportunities in Uganda

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF (2007), Children's Rights and Journalism Practice - A Rights-Based Perspective

## Background

Modern print and electronic media “feed both into and from the community or communities.”<sup>5</sup> Print media contributes to development by disseminating truthful and useful information, relating parts of society and sensitizing people on development and social change needs.<sup>6</sup> The media is also persuasive, motivational, provides learning materials and appropriate development information, shapes public opinion, influences public policy and is used to voice and promote the rights of marginalized groups.<sup>7</sup>

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has 54 Articles that outline different child rights that are broadly classified in four groups; survival rights, protection rights, development rights and participation rights. Cognizant that several articles of the CRC deal with the media and children, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlights three main areas relating to children that need to be regularly considered (by the media). These include the need to identify means to improve the image of the child through media reporting, the need to encourage children to participate actively in media engagements, as well as the need to protect children from harmful influences in the media. Article 12 of the legally binding CRC, which Uganda ratified and is therefore obliged to respect, protect and fulfill the provisions therein; recognizes the right of children to express their views in matters affecting them, depending on their age and evolving capacity. Article 13 of the CRC guarantees the right of children to freedom of expression “either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.” Article 16 of the CRC provides for the protection of children against interference and attack on their “privacy, family, home or correspondence, honor or reputation” while Article 17 recognizes the media’s importance and encourages the dissemination of materials that socially and culturally benefit children. Article 17 of the CRC underscores the need to develop appropriate guidelines to protect children from information and material that is injurious to their well-being. The highlighted Articles of the CRC undoubtedly establish child rights that could be violated by irresponsible media practices through insensitive reporting, misrepresentation and by denying children space to meaningfully express their opinions on various matters that concern them.

Various laws that govern the media in Uganda, including; the 1995 Constitution, the Penal Code Act (Cap 120), the Anti – Pornographic Act (2014), the Uganda Communications Act (2013), the Press and Journalist Act 1995, the Electronic Media Act (Cap 105), among others require media to protect children and to facilitate them to express their views. Article 29 of the Uganda Constitution protects children’s freedom of speech and expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media and the right to protection from social or economic exploitation. The Constitution confers the duty to protect children against any form of abuse, harassment or ill-treatment to Ugandan citizens, which duty applies to media houses located and registered in Uganda, and therefore legal persons. Minimum Broadcasting Standards highlighted under Schedule 4 of the Uganda Communications Act (2013) requires broadcasters and video operators to ensure that programmes are neither contrary to public morality nor promote violence and ethnical prejudice in the public, particularly among children and youths. The Electronic Media Act (Cap 105) provides that journalists shall not be compelled to disclose the sources of their information, which arguably includes information received from children - except if the consent of the person who gave the information has been obtained or through a court order. Section 14 of the Anti-Pornography Act 2014 prohibits child pornography, including “the production, publication, broadcasting, procuring, importing, exporting or any form of abetting materials that depict images of children.” Section 10 of the Children (Amendment) Act 2016 requires local government councils to use and inevitably partner with the media to trace parents or guardians of lost or abandoned children. In Uganda, media practitioners developed a Code of Ethics that governs their conduct and facilitates adjudication of disagreements involving the media and the public<sup>8</sup>. The Code of Ethics, Kimumwe (2014) bars media institutions from identifying victims of sexual assaults and publishing or broadcasting material that is likely to contribute to such identification, unless informed consent to such publications is given by the victims. Children, according to the Code of Ethics shall particularly neither be identified as victims nor as witnesses, or defendants in sex related offenses; however remotely.

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5 Boafo, K (1991); Module on Development Communication 1, African Council for Communication Education. Nairobi, Kenya

6 Okigbo, C (1991), Print Media and National Development in Africa. Module on Development Communication, Nairobi: African Council for Communication Education.

7 ibid

8 Kimumwe, P (2014), Media Regulation and Practice in Uganda: A Journalist’s Handbook

The Code of Ethics further provides that;

Except in matters of public interest, e.g. cases of child abuse or abandonment, journalists shall not normally interview or photograph children on subjects involving their personal welfare in the absence of, or without the consent of a parent or other adult who is responsible for the children ... Children shall not be approached or photographed while in a formal institution without the permission of the institution's authority... Media institutions shall not publish or broadcast the names of any underage offenders (below 18 years) arrested by Police or tried in the criminal courts. Where such identification must be made, the media house shall explain the overriding reasons that led to such an editorial decision... Out of respect to values of common decency, the media shall take extra care when dealing with adults-only material... Television stations shall also schedule adult movies later at night when children are in bed. Such programs shall be properly labeled with appropriate advisories including in the TV schedules published in newspapers... Radio stations shall air adults-only programs late at night when children are in bed and they shall make appropriate promotional advisories to that effect.

A 2013 study on *Media and Child Protection in Uganda*<sup>9</sup> concluded that laws and policies related to media coverage of child protection issues in Uganda are generally commendable and empower media professionals to identify news events on violence, exploitation and abuse of children. Media practitioners are also at liberty to use both legal and policy frameworks to strengthen their news stories. UNICEF (2007), highlighted that the media plays an important role in child protection, mobilizes society around child rights and that media portrayals provide role models who influence young people's attitudes and expectations. A study conducted by Oyero (2010)<sup>10</sup> highlights pertinent observations of various authors regarding media and its role in protecting children. The study highlights that the media is powerful, since it penetrates every segment of modern-day society, and in the process effectively influences how people view themselves, their neighbors, their communities and their world. The study observes that the primary source of information on social and cultural matters is the media, which provides platforms of debate; as its choices of subjects and participants helps to shape agendas. The media according to UNICEF (2007) also plays public interest watchdog roles; improves the image, rights and prospects of children and is also a societal mirror that enables people to better understand what is going on in their environment. The media also has a role in helping the public understand emergencies, which is key to mobilizing effective responses that save children's lives, raises voices of the most vulnerable and changes adults' perception of children by showing good role models when media programmes respect the standards and principles of the CRC. UNICEF (2007)<sup>11</sup> further submits that media can also publicly raise issues that are usually difficult to discuss, such as violence, challenging adult behavior. According to Oyero (2010), through mass campaigns and the coverage of child rights, the media places relevant issues on the public and political agenda and plays a central role in forming public opinion, mediating information and *"casting an eye on events that few of us directly experience and renders remote happenings observable and meaningful."*

Oyero (2010) also highlights that the media forms and influences people's attitudes and behavior, thereby increasing society's awareness of, and response to child abuse and neglect and further submits that news and features aid reporting of child abuse cases, research as well as intervention strategies. The study also highlights that media attention to child abuse can positively impact on public opinion, professional and political responses to children's circumstances, and that journalists are among others *"agents of social control; they are 'a kind of deviance defining elite' who articulate the 'proper bounds to behaviour' in our society."* Sporadic mass media can also be used to undertake child protection education and prevention campaigns which help to broaden communities' knowledge of child abuse and neglect; as well as influence people's attitudes towards children, fostering the change of behaviors that contribute to, or precipitate child abuse and neglect. The media also brings forth children's issues *"by allowing children who have been working ... as domestic servants, on the streets, in factories and mines/quarries as well as those rehabilitated"* to participate in media programmes. The study observes that the media provides *"means of breaking the cycles of suppression and denial"* and *"that without media attention, governments will not act to improve the protection of children."* According to UNICEF (2007), the need to protect children necessitates some media interventions. This is because the rights of children may be violated by inappropriate exposure and media stereotyping. There are many instances where the media has substituted direct identification of children with stereotypical labelling of offenders. Despite efforts by organizations like the International Federation of Journalists, which in 1998 launched an initiative to encourage responsible coverage of children stereotyping; the pattern remains evident in all continents.

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9 Panos Eastern Africa (2013), *The Role of Media in Child Protection: Challenges and Opportunities in Uganda*

10 Oyero, O (2010) *Children: as Invisible and Voiceless as Ever in the Nigerian News Media*, Covenant University, Nigeria

11 UNICEF (2007), *Children's Rights and Journalism Practice - A Rights-Based Perspective*

UNICEF (2007), authoritatively notes that;

Coverage of children rarely features in journalism training because, by and large, journalists deal with adult themes in an adult world for an adult audience.....It is rarer still to find newspapers soliciting comments from young people themselves about the issues of the moment. After all, they are not the primary market for most magazines and newspapers. Children, therefore, may not be taken seriously by media professionals because their main target is the adult market. The predicament is that children are consumers of mainstream media products which are not created specifically for them. News is regarded as something primarily for and about adults. An additional danger is that, in this adult market, children have access to potentially harmful material, including the depiction of violence, sex and sexualized 'images of children. The development of new forms of communication such as the internet has raised concern, particularly because there is little or no control of material on the internet... it should be a priority among media producers to ensure that children are not brutalized or put at risk by easy access to certain material, including imagery that appears to condone or encourage violence... Attention must also be given to the issue of media literacy among children.

UNICEF (2007) further observes that;

The media need to rethink their approach to coverage of children and young people – avoiding stereotyping, with all its consequences – and promote media literacy. A new generation is growing up, disenchanted with depressing news and misrepresentation of them; with new technology at their fingertips, they are creating their own media online and bypassing traditional methods of media production. We have already seen the creation of online communities and broadcasting channels in Bebo, YouTube and Myspace

Whereas journalists world over subscribe to particular codes of conduct, UNICEF (2007) submits that;

In practice most journalists have a hazy idea of the detail in the codes and rely on a general understanding of their principles. Children, on the other hand, require precise protocols if their human rights are to be protected. Journalistic activity which touches on the lives and welfare of children should always be carried out with appreciation of the perspective of children. Journalists and media organizations should strive to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct in reporting children's affairs.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) *Guidelines and Principles for Reporting on Issues Involving Children*<sup>12</sup> provides that all journalists and media professionals have the responsibility to maintain the highest ethical and professional standards that require them to promote within the industry, the widest possible dissemination of information about the CRC and its implications on exercising independent journalism. IFJ guidelines highlight that media organizations should consider violation of child rights as well as issues related to children's safety, privacy, security and all forms of exploitation among other issues, as significant investigation and public debate questions. IFJ underscores the need to ensure that all journalistic activities that concern the lives and welfare of children are always conducted with appreciation of the vulnerability of children. According to the IFJ, journalists and media organizations shall strive to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct in reporting children's affairs, including maintaining accuracy and sensitivity excellence; and evade programming and publication of information which is damaging to children. The media should also avoid using stereotypes and sensational presentation involving children; consider consequences of publishing materials concerning children and ensure that they minimize harm to children. The media should also guard against visually identifying children, unless it is evidently in public interest; they should give children the right of access to media, so as to express their views willingly and ensure that they independently verify information provided by children, without putting child informants at risk. In addition, the media should also avoid using sexualized images of children and utilize fair, open and straightforward methods to obtain pictures, knowledge and consent of children. The media should also vigilantly verify credentials of organizations purporting to speak for or to represent children's interests. The IFJ also lays out detailed guidelines on reporting sexual abuse and exploitation issues involving children.

UNICEF's Principles and Guidelines for Media Reporting on Children (2005)<sup>13</sup>, were also designed to help journalists to report on children's issues in public interest, without compromising the rights of children and putting children at risk. They include six over-arching principles; six guidelines for interviewing children; and seven guidelines for reporting on children's issues. The six principles underpin the need to respect the dignity and rights of every child in all circumstance; and the need to pay special attention to each child's right to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them and to be protected from harm and retribution whenever the media interviews (and reports on) children; the need to protect the best interests of all children over any other consideration, including advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of child rights; and the need to give due weight to the child's right to have their views taken into account in accordance with their age and maturity.

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<sup>12</sup> The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) *Guidelines and Principles for Reporting on Issues Involving Children*

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF (2003): Principles for Ethical Reporting on Children: [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_tools\\_guidelines.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_tools_guidelines.html)

The other principles underpin the need to consult people closest to the child's situation and those who are better positioned to assess potential political, social and cultural ramifications of any reportage.

There is also a principle that bars the publicizing of a story or an image that could place the child, their siblings or peers at risk, even when their identities have been changed, obscured or not used. SASCU conducted a rapid scan on child rights and protection related reports among selected broadcast media houses in 2018 as highlighted in the document below. The media report highlights opportunities that could be leveraged and scaled up to enhance child protection and the promotion of child rights as well as challenges that need to be addressed.

### Highlights Concerning Children, as Reported by the Broadcast Media in 2018

Date	Media	Media House	Paraphrased Highlights
2018-11-21	TV	NBS TV	<b>Unity FM in Lira closed.</b> A staff was detained at Lira Central Police Station. Other radio stations were ordered not to report on the events that led to the murder of an 11-year old child. <b>The move is to avert the escalation of violence in Lira.</b> RDC Milton Odongo notes that they are investigating different media houses for inciting violence.
2018-11-16	Radio	Super FM	<b>Media practitioners across Uganda urged to join the cause of advocating for children's rights.</b> The National Children Authority boss, while addressing journalists today at Grand Global Hotel in Kampala, said that children's rights are being abused at an alarming rate in the country, hence the need for concerted efforts to reverse the trend.
2018-11-16	Radio	XFM	Speaking at a <b>media training workshop on Violence Against Children</b> , the Executive Director, National Children's Authority, urged Police to exhaustively investigate possible negligence by the school management of St. Bernard's Many. There is need to find out if relevant security measures like fire extinguishers, emergency exits etc. which could have averted death were in place. Culprits should be made to account.
2018-11-12	TV	NTV	<b>The Kingdom of Busoga has partnered with Nation Media Group to launch a project designed to improve access to safe and clean water for children and vulnerable communities in the region.</b>
2018-10-26	TV	TV WEST	<b>Research conducted by UNICEF shows that most children are still being tortured, despite several campaigns against child abuse run by media houses, especially Vision Group.</b>
2018-09-12	Radio	Radio Etop	The Chairperson of Iteso Cultural Union has expressed <b>concern over the misuse of social media among children, which is greatly contributing to moral decay.</b> The leader was bothered that parents have just kept quiet and looked on as their children engage in misuse of mobile phones and other devices, which in turn affects the way they behave.
2018-09-07	Radio	Power FM	Raising Voices, a Non-Profit Organization working towards the prevention of violence against women and children is worried that the number of abused girls and boys is increasing. According to the organization, <b>94% of girls and 93% of boys aged between 11 and 14 experience physical violence, including beatings and corporal punishments at schools and in their communities. The Program Officer says that the media has exposed some of these cases which highlight that teachers are major culprits.</b>
2018-09-06	Radio	Buddu FM	<b>Uganda Media Development Forum has sensitized parents on the dangers of forcing under aged children into marriage.</b> This occurred during an engagement at Maria Floor Hotel in Masaka.
2018-09-04	TV	NBS TV	<b>Gender Minister has refuted media reports that wrongly quoted her to have said that all school children should be screened for HIV.</b> The minister's remarks were in response to an outburst from a section of the public.
2018-08-30	TV	NTV	<b>The Commissioner for Children and Youth Affairs in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, while discussing possible solutions designed to stop violence against children, said that government conducted a survey after various sections of the media had for a long-time highlighted incident of violence against children.</b>
2018-06-16	Radio	Bukedde Radio	Nakawa Division Mayor <b>challenged parents to assume their responsibility of taking care of their children by regulating their usage of social media.</b> He said this during the commemoration of day of the African Child organized by Naguru Teenage Information and Health Center.
2018-06-11	Radio	Dembe FM	<b>Parents have been warned against giving their children smart phones, especially those below 18 years.</b> While speaking in Nakawa Division, the mayor noted that some people who kidnap children use social media to get access to the children.
2018-05-16	Radio	Galaxy FM	<b>Parents attribute the continuous early pregnancies, murders and prostitution to technology. They say children learn many bad behaviors through social media.</b> Alcoholism and living in incomplete houses were also highlighted as contributory factors.
2018-03-23	Radio	Capital FM	<b>The man seen on a social media video caning his son is expected to appear in court today on charges of assault and child abuse. He is currently being detained at Kira Road Police Station.</b>
2018-03-20	Radio	Capital FM	<b>Police has opened a general inquiry file to investigate a video that has been making rounds on social media showing a Nursery School Child being beaten severely by a male adult. The video shows the child identified as a 4-year-old pupil being beaten on the legs, the back and the head.</b>

The Panos Eastern Africa (2013) study captioned; *The Role of Media in Child Protection: Challenges and Opportunities in Uganda* noted that Uganda's print media, which is dominated by two mainstream daily newspapers regularly covers child protection issues. The study showed that there are also many radio stations and a few TV stations that run children's programs. However, no cautious child protection campaigns are undertaken by most broadcast media outlets. The study highlighted some child protection issues that need to be debated further in Uganda's public domain. The issues include the need to discuss inadequacies in enforcing existing child protection laws, as well as the need to examine underlying causes of child abductions and child sacrifice. The study further noted the fact that many child focused CSOs are using different child protection standards, which raises quality assurance issues. The need to ensure child protection stories move from merely being reported about to a point where responsible parties are held accountable was also highlighted as one of the issues media needs to pick up. The Panos Eastern Africa (2013) study concluded that coverage of child protection issues by the media remains stuck in traditional news reporting formats that are event based and often without a sense of detached objectivity, which hampers advocacy work. The study highlighted that there is enormous potential for the media to establish child protection partnerships with various stakeholders with shared responsibilities and understanding. The study also emphasizes the need for the media and CSOs to work together to develop and create awareness on standard child rights performance measures, as well as the need to address existing challenges in promoting child participation. The media also needs to devise new strategies in reporting and packaging child abuse issues that *"have become too frequent ... to remain 'unusual, and newsworthy'"* with the resultant repercussion that *"abuse stories no longer have the shock effect."* The need to ensure that Government agencies and CSOs acquire appropriate media literacy is also required to ensure that *"they all speak each other's language"* as they join forces to protect and promote child rights. The study also concluded that both public and privately-owned media outlets in Uganda have child protection capacity gaps, including limited skills, internal structural issues and funding, that need to be addressed. The study therefore recommends child protection actors to dialogue, share information, values, skills, experiences and competences; and urges government and CSOs to support media houses and establish children desks, with well trained staff. According to the study, developing and rolling out tailor-made courses that will skill and re-tool journalists, to enable them report ethically on child protection issues should also be considered.

# Report on The Stakeholders' Dialogue on The Role of Media in Child Protection



**Theme:** The Role of Media in Child Protection: Is the Media Doing Enough?  
**Date:** Thursday 9th May, 2019  
**Venue:** Protea Hotel, Kampala

## Media Dialogue Objectives:

- Discuss and generate consensus on the critical and strategic role of media in promoting child rights and the protection of vulnerable children in Uganda.
- Generate recommendations to enhance the role of media in child protection.

## Welcome Remarks:



Mr. Innocent Byaruhanga Oburye, the Executive Director of Save Street Children Uganda (SASCU) welcomed participants, who included journalists from print and electronic media, government officials, development partners and CSO representatives. In his communication, Innocent noted that SASCU and other child focused CSOs recognize that the work of protecting children is enormous, challenging and overbearing. However, it is a job CSOs

cannot do alone. CSOs therefore realize the need to partner and collaborate with government, development partners and the media. He noted that there is need to engage the media on what can be done to end violence against children. He also further noted that the media is a very powerful institution which informs the nation, provides space to facilitate the discussion of ideas, keeps an eye on institutions to make sure they work and of course entertain. He observed that in its daily routine, the media comes across hundreds of child abuse stories. The abuse of children is in various forms, including among others, sexual abuse, child labour, torture, malnutrition, corporal punishment, indecent exposure, and exploitation. It also includes different forms of violence committed in homes, schools and other settings, often by people who are very close to children.

He however noted with concern that in the busy daily news schedules, many child abuse incidents have become routine and daily happenings that no longer attract media attention. There is therefore need to pause and think about the fact that: a child abused is a “future compromised.” The child will suffer and perhaps end up on the street, yet children have a right to live descent lives, to be loved and to have a future.

He pointed out the fact that the dialogue has therefore been organized to explore avenues through which we can collectively work together to bring violence against children on the forefront of the media agenda. He underscored the need to have broader engagements with media houses, especially Editors - who decide on content and with CSOs and development partners - who can support capacity building for journalists. In his remarks, he observed that this is a call for all of us. With gladness, he noted that critical and eminent persons, including the Commissioner for Children, the Chairperson of the Uganda Parliamentary Forum for Children and distinguished panelists from the media, government and CSOs are present to brainstorm and agree on how this much needed engagement can work for the benefit of children.

He concluded by noting that, “at the end of this event, we hope to wear new lenses - as we look at stories of child abuse as a MUST DO.” If the country does not invest in children now, if we don’t protect them from abuse now, they might grow up to haunt us. Therefore, let us stand up to the defense of children. At Save Street Children Uganda, we are ready, and with open hands, we shall engage with you all.”

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## Commissioner for Youth and Children Affairs Remarks

The Commissioner in charge of Youth and Children Affairs at the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Mr. Mondo Kyateka officially opened the media dialogue. He spoke at length, noting that media is a potentially important partner in the struggle against child abuse – adding that Government commends media houses that dedicate space and time for issues of violence against children. He highlighted that stories that draw government attention have been published in various media houses and observed that media has the potential to perform much better - Can media do better?

The Commissioner noted that Government closely monitors media coverage on violence against children and other issues concerning child welfare. He therefore urged the media to work together with civil society organizations, such as Save Street Children Uganda (SASCU), to eliminate all forms of violence against children in Uganda. He stated that often, media houses produce stories that have good content, but are orphaned because they do not make reference to appropriate laws or policies - this often leaves the public wondering if government is doing anything to combat violence against children. He therefore requested journalists to learn to make use of existing policy and legal frameworks to inform their stories and make them robust and authoritative. He also noted that the level of many media writers' appreciation of child protection issues is very low – yet child protection is a very wide and rich area. This therefore requires journalists to undertake research and share the findings with the masses. With dismay, he noted that he has not yet seen features in the newspapers that address issues of children noting that; “the fight against violence against children is a good fight. It is a justified fight and nobody should be ashamed about it. 57% of the population in Uganda are children – why must we concentrate elsewhere and not on children? Do you know that ‘street children’ can be a hazard? These are our children and we need to collectively protect them – it is not the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. We therefore need to highlight these issues so that they are brought to the attention of Government.”

The Commissioner also noted that journalists' stories on children are often episodic and event based. However, the world has evolved and journalists need to engage by being part of the story and part of the solution, without compromising objectivity. The Commissioner further highlighted that when it comes to matters of violence against children, the media must not sit on the fence, but rather identify themselves with the “good fight.” The Commissioner noted that research has also shown that many newsrooms look at child abuse stories as too frequent and too routine in the fast paced – 24/7 news cycle. Henceforth, we need to change this perception and mindset to appreciate the importance of child protection stories. He noted that the principles of factuality and accuracy are key in journalism, but often, one finds distorted facts, wrong figures and misrepresented quotations on issues about children. Media has also been blamed for coverage that creates fear, blame and mistrust. On many occasions, people engaged in child protection, including public servants will often shun the media for fear of being trashed. Therefore, media needs to build more trust with government departments, development partners and civil society organizations involved in child protection. Many stories on violence against children also lack the voices of children. There is therefore need to get children's points of view and thoughts on issues that affect them. He also noted that; “we often think that children are just a small doze on the earth and they do not have views, but they do – children have their side of the story. Why can't we have their voices heard? Their voices matter!”

He concluded by ardently noting that; “If we do not invest in fighting all forms of child abuse, we will not build trust and strengthen partnerships. Until we are on top of the evil of child abuse, we should not say we have done enough. Therefore, CSOs such as SASCU should build the capacity of journalists to help them appreciate the breadth, depth and width of violence against children – and the key principles of child protection. We should team up to interrogate this subject within our media houses; Development Partners should support CSO engagements with the media; and Media houses should invest in child protection through training, provision of equipment, skills development and providing space on different media platforms for campaigns against child abuse. Media should always remind society to think of making the cost benefit analysis of child protection - the cost of child marriage according to UNICEF is \$2.8 Million annually in terms of labour which is lost and death; and the cost of Gender Based Violence in Uganda is 37 Billion Uganda Shillings annually. Media has the mandate to cover national issues, including issues relating to children and child abuse. It is therefore a formidable partner with whom States have a natural contract in the promotion of what is good for the country. However, if the media is used wrongly, it can fuel conflict. As media, you have a formidable role to transform children's lives – draw government's attention and call for appropriate action!”

## Panel Presentations and Discussions

A panel composed of various child rights and media personnel made a series of informed and impassioned presentations that were later discussed in plenary sessions. Panelists included; James Kigozi, the Executive Director of Uganda Media Development Foundation (UMDF), who has also worked with a cross section of high-profile media organizations in Uganda, including The New Vision and Nation Media Group. He has also lectured at Uganda Christian University and worked at Uganda AIDS Commission as the Spokesman for the Government of Uganda on HIV Coordination issue. He has also undertaken a wide range of consultancy work for non-governmental organizations and presented papers at various key international conferences; Lydia Najjemba Wasula, the Orphans and Vulnerable Children National Coordinator at the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD); Charles Odongtho, an eminent media practitioner and Lawyer; Cathy Mwesigwa a Senior Editor at Uganda's leading daily - The New Vision Newspaper; and Iryne Marunga Banoba, a Child Rights and Gender Expert as well as Programs Director at Save Street Children Uganda (SASCU). The panel discussion was moderated by John Baptist Wasswa, a seasoned Journalist, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Journalism and Communication at Makerere University and current Chairperson of the Uganda Media Development Foundation Board. John Baptist Wasswa has also worked as a News Editor at The New Vision, Managing Editor at the Daily Monitor, Editor of the Weekly Topic, and Consulting Editor at the Red Pepper Publications.

### Highlights of Panelists' Presentations



**Charles Odongtho** highlighted three concerns regarding the role of media in child protection.

Firstly, he highlighted the need to ensure that media appreciates and obtains informed consent of the children it engages. This places enormous responsibility on media regarding the need to ensure that children are adequately guided. This also requires securing the consent and support of the children's parents or guardians before and during an interview. Charles also noted that Social Media is a concern, as it is one of the "drivers" of child abuse, hence the need to undertake broader discussions involving different stakeholders, to ensure that the medium is adequately regulated. He observed that "*Online Citizen*

*Journalism has no gatekeeper*" yet it predisposes children to different forms of abuse, including stigmatization. He noted that; *social media is now a terror wall which continuously facilitates the abuse of children.*" He also noted that the overriding child rights principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child including the best interest of the child; non-discrimination; voluntary, active and meaningful child participation as well as the need to ensure the survival and development of the child need to be grounded in media reporting.



**James Kigozi** stressed the need to utilize media to sensitize communities on the dangers of violence against children. He noted that in many communities, there are cultural practices that condone violence against children, as some forms of child abuse are socially accepted. He also noted that media today, more than ever before constitutes an enormous opportunity that should be leveraged to sensitize communities on the dangers of child abuse. He argued that in the quest to effectively harness the potential of the media in promoting child rights - that includes child protection, there is need to train a critical number of media actors on child protection and also strengthen their capacity to report effectively on child rights issues. He noted that UMDF engagements across the

country have continued to highlight the enormous need to capacitate a cross-section of the media on child rights issues. James also underscored the need for child protection actors to establish partnerships with media houses— "*including personal relationships with committed child rights journalists.*" He stressed the need for media to be sensitive to the realities and implications of stories of sexual abuse involving children, noting that there is need to ensure that reporting is always conducted in a manner that avoids scandalizing the children involved.



**Catherine Mwesigwa** noted that; “considering that children constitute 57% of Uganda’s population, there is no way we can ignore children in the media.” She highlighted that most of the content media publishes directly or indirectly predisposes children to different forms of abuse. She said that quite often, media thinks that the work of protecting vulnerable children is generally for the relatives of the affected children, orphanages and foster care institutions, forgetting that the media also has a critical responsibility in child

protection. In her submission, she noted that Journalists need to be supported to assume their responsibility in this regard. Catherine further noted that adequate circulation of news concerning children requires time and resources, yet the media is sometimes handicapped. She also observed that the attitude of the media in particular and the nation as a whole towards prioritizing and planning for children is inadequate. This results to some children ending up on the streets and in other vulnerable situations. There is therefore need for the media and other stakeholders to prioritize children’s issues.



**Lydia Najjemba** highlighted that research conducted by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, indicates that in Uganda, 35% of girls and 17% of boys below the age of 18 are sexually abused every year. In addition, 58% of girls and 59% of boys below the age of 18 in the country are physically abused, while 35% of both boys and girls are abused emotionally. Lydia also noted that many children trafficked from Karamoja to Kampala end up on the streets. She highlighted that MGLSD has

adopted the UN approved INSPIRE strategies to end violence against children in Uganda. In her opinion, there is need for the media to partner with government and other stakeholders to address the high rates of child abuse; and to support the rollout of effective child abuse preventive and remedial interventions. This includes the need for the media to appreciate and ensure that all engagements involving children adhere to the four cardinal child rights principles of; survival and development, participation, non-discrimination and the best interest of the child. Lydia also urged media practitioners to study the national parenting guidelines to facilitate their dissemination, as this will enormously contribute towards efforts aimed at ending violence against children in Uganda.

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*“Considering that children constitute 57% of Uganda's population, there is no way we can ignore children in the media.”*

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**Iryne Marunga Banoba** emphasized the need to mainstream the protection of the rights of children in the media. This among others, requires the adoption of child safeguarding policies by different media houses. She reiterated the need for CSOs and development partners to work with the media fraternity to enhance their capacity to protect children and promote child rights. She also noted that there is a need to undertake comprehensive research on the child

protection benefits and challenges of emerging social media platforms; and the need for CSOs and development partners to work with the media to effectively disseminate research findings in the quest to end violence against children in Uganda.

## Synthesized and Collated Issues Arising from Plenary Discussions

After the panelists' presentations, media dialogue participants were given an opportunity to comment, raise questions, seek clarity and to make relevant observations and contributions. Below are highlights of plenary discussions as well as issues that emerged.

- Participants noted that many child abuse cases are not reported in the media because there is limited availability of relevant information for journalists, yet news stories are derived from facts. Many child abuse witnesses are also reluctant to reveal relevant information to the media and Police Officers are sometimes reluctant to reveal information, especially on sensitive matters. There are also child abuse cases that are not reported to relevant authorities, and will therefore not be investigated or brought to the attention of the media, child protection specialists, social workers or law enforcement officials.
- Some instances of child abuse and other child rights concerns are also not brought to the attention of media or to any other relevant authorities, due to cultural as well as other social and community beliefs and practices. This is common when relatives are involved as perpetrators of violence against children. Also, some of the would-be sources of information do not reveal it because they do not realize the illegality of the occurrence, or constituted form of child abuse. Others have fears and concerns of possible repercussions to themselves, their neighbors or relatives in case they report. Sometimes informal actions are also taken on behalf of the abused child and are in the process; often not reported to Police authorities, and much less to the media. Some of the cases that could have attracted media attention are also reported to Local Councils (LCs) *“where they usually fade due to lack of evidence or as a result of being compromised.”*
- It was noted that print media has, to a reasonable extent continued to cover and report relevant child rights issues. This was highlighted in the Panos Eastern Africa (2013) study. It was noted that the informative *“study which was both quantitative and qualitative... showed that in just two dailies, about 200 out of around 700 stories that were covered in a certain period involved children’s issues.”* It was further observed that media reports on various aspects; *“the media does not only report on child abuse... for example when the media covers ‘Fresh Kid’ performing .... that is also reporting on child rights. There should therefore be measured criticism - there is a wide coverage of children’s issues, but we need to review the qualitative and informative nature of journalistic reporting.”*
- Journalists noted that there are certain cases that are risky for them to investigate and report about, *“especially grave offenses like defilement, whose investigation requires going to risky places.”* On other occasions, they have encountered political interference, which limits their work. On that note, there is need to *“consider convening special sessions of media engagements for sexually abused and other brutalized children.”* Investigative journalists are therefore urged to cooperate with Police to undertake certain investigations, and have joint efforts designed to prevent child abuse. Journalists also urged the Police to desist from unnecessarily interfering with their work, as they fulfill their legal and legitimate mandate to inform the public. It was noted that sometimes media endangers children; *“for example if I commit a crime and you report where my children are located, you are endangering them.”*
- The Children (Amendment) Act 2016 and other laws oblige community members who witness violation of child rights to report to relevant authorities. However, child abuse and neglect cases involving children are rarely reported, not even by professionals who have custody of children. As a result, many child abuse and neglect cases remain undocumented.
- It was also noted that there are many untrained, “quack” and “masquerading” journalists who lack requisite skills to write scripts and to adhere to professional ethics. A participant noted that; *“Untrained journalists are practicing journalism and community reporters have been employed as journalists, without any basic training. This is negatively affecting the quality of child protection reporting.”* Most of the trained and qualified journalists also have inadequate child protection knowledge and some are not adequately remunerated. This compromises the quality and extent to which child protection issues are covered in the media.

- There were also observations that Social Media is supporting communities to address child abuse reporting gaps in the mainstream media; “WhatsApp shows images of abused children, even if the mainstream media does not report.” However, Social Media has also got challenges - participants cited the example of when the Minister of State for Youth and Children Affairs rightly highlighted the need for ‘Fresh Kid’s’ singing career handlers to ensure that his education and other best welfare interests as a child are not compromised -*“She was terrorized by Social Media.”* It was noted that; *“If a minister can be terrorized... media journalists will most likely be intimidated to report certain stories.* Some participants also observed that there are several laws that could be used to regulate Social Media, but were concerned that; *“they can also be misused as political tools.”*
- The need for child focused CSOs and Development Partners to support efforts geared towards ensuring child rights and child protection is mainstreamed in the media was stressed.
- Participants at the media dialogue also noted that there are many child friendly laws and policies in Uganda, however they are hardly implemented. There is therefore need for media to continuously sensitize the public on existing laws and policies, to enable them appreciate their relevance in promoting child rights. Media practitioners also noted that the availability of relevant data on some child protection issues in Uganda is scanty. As a result, there is limited data available for the media to report on some aspects like child labour and the situation of children in refugee situations in Uganda. It was observed that; *“Information is confined in Ministries and NGOs ... They hardly share relevant facts and yet they expect media to report on issues of child protection.”* There is therefore need to avail the media with relevant data; and official spokespersons of various government agencies working on children’s issues should closely work with media to address this gap. The media is however urged to ensure that the data involving children is adequately analyzed and disseminated.
- There is also need for media houses to develop and / or rollout child safeguarding policies in their workplaces, particularly for staff who work on children’s issues. Ultimately, CSOs and Development partners should support the media in this regard.
- The need for media to cover both the challenges and good practices among children in refugee settings across the country was highlighted. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) underscored the need to; *“cover children in refugee settings’ challenges as well as the good things that are happening in their lives, with a focus on positive stories, such as children who are in school, or have gained education and sports scholarships...”*
- Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) noted that it works with journalists when engaging and reporting on issues concerning children in street situations. The Uganda Police also noted that various media houses regularly give them “airtime”. Such partnerships can be scaled up to address other relevant issues involving children.
- The need to establish a network of journalists committed to covering child rights issues was highlighted. The need to learn and adopt successful practices and models where the media has successfully worked with CSOs and development partners on important issues was also noted. The campaign against HIV/ AIDs where a “core group” of journalists committed to the cause was formed and called upon at short notice with or without supportive resources was cited as a good example. There is therefore need to *“get a core group dedicated to covering child rights issues. This will be part of the solution, as the core group will ensure continuity...Health journalists have a good network that should be emulated.”*
- It was also noted that there are very many vulnerable children who are brutalized by Police, such as children living and working on the streets, yet the media hardly highlights their plight.

## Media Dialogue Resolutions

<p><b>After the plenary discussions, participants agreed on ten resolutions.</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Undertake multisectoral engagements and partnerships.</b> <i>(This should also strengthen   establish national and district coordination mechanisms that will involve working with the media.)</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Establish strategic partnerships</b> involving children, including children living on the streets and in refugee situations, among others to inform the media, government and other programmatic engagements.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Institute awards for print, online and broadcast media</b> to motivate journalists <i>(Child protection stakeholders should use awards to motivate and inspire child protection journalism).</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Train and mentor media and other key stakeholders in Uganda</b> on their roles in protecting the rights of children in street situations as well as other vulnerable children including children in refugee settings. <i>(This should among others, entail training the media and other key stakeholders on qualitative reporting and existing child rights policy and legal frameworks. Media should also be mentored to avoid victimizing children by portraying them as ill-fated and to mitigate the exposure of abused or victimized children.)</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Regulate Social Media engagements.</b> <i>This will necessitate engaging the Media Council and other key stakeholders.</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Constitute a Network   Core Team of child rights journalists;</b> “Uganda Media Child Protection Network” which shall be coordinated by MGLSD. <i>(A critical number of dedicated child rights reporters should be mobilized.)</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Media houses should develop child safeguarding policies.</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>MGLSD should devise mechanisms for enhancing dissemination of relevant child rights information to the media at both national and district levels.</b> <i>(Government and CSOs should periodically highlight and share key issues that media should cover. There is a need to develop an updated compendium of child friendly international, regional and national laws and policies for the media; and the need to periodically develop simplified information packs and talking points emerging from research on pertinent child rights issues, which the media should report about.)</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Undertake resource mobilization</b> to facilitate coverage of relatively costly issues concerning children in the media.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Development of a child rights media engagement strategy</b> by MGLSD and other relevant stakeholders.</li> </ul>

## Closing Remarks

In his closing remarks, the Chairperson of Uganda Parliamentary Forum for Children (UPFC), Hon. Bernard Atiku noted that media has a critical role to play in the promotion of child rights in our country, Uganda. He noted that since the ninth Parliament (2011 to 2016), he has been a member of UPFC, but it is the first time he has participated in a media engagement designed to enhance child protection in his capacity as a Member of Parliament - this he noted, is a gap which child rights stakeholders have largely ignored. He therefore commended SASCU and its partners for convening the media stakeholders' dialogue, noting that if we are to significantly advance the interests of children, media has to be involved as a partner. He further noted that there are key recommendations that the Parliamentary Forum for Children has "picked" and will consider tabling on the floor of Parliament in addition to undertaking child rights advocacy. "As Parliament, we remain committed and pledge to be allies in efforts geared towards enhancing child protection in Uganda." He observed that this is in tandem with UPFC's motto – Children First. "It is UPFC's responsibility to push some of the highlighted actions to the next level, and we commit to be part and parcel of the outputs and subsequent outcomes of this deliberation," he noted. In his communication, he underscored the need for MGLSD to fast track the development of the Children (Amendment) Act 2016 Regulations, noting that the Police, media as well as other stakeholders need the regulations to facilitate adequate implementation of the Act; adding that these regulations, act as a monitoring tool. He also highlighted the fact that media needs to study and use new pieces of legislation and policies such as the Computer Misuse Act and the Integrated Early Childhood Policy. which are relevant to efforts aimed at enhancing children's wellbeing in the country.

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*"As Parliament, we remain committed and pledge to be allies in efforts geared towards enhancing child protection in Uganda."*

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