ALCOHOL BURDEN IN UGANDA

WHY THE UGANDA GOVERNMENT MUST ACT FAST TO REGULATE AND STEM THE HUGE COST

Points to consider why a new law and an effective Alcohol Policy must be put in place

Background

Unregulated alcohol production, sale and consumption sends the wrong message to the nation’s youth, children and fear it will lead to serious public health and social problems. Our children will be worse with unregulated alcohol environment.

It has been estimated that the per capita consumption in Uganda is 11.9 litres (WHO, 2011) implying high consumption levels. This is a slight decline from 2005 when Uganda was number one consumer of alcohol with per capita alcohol consumption of 19.5 litres. In March 2013, CNN study ranked Uganda 8th in the world and first on the African continent in liquor intake.

Alcohol is the most commonly used psychoactive substance and globally, causes 1.8 million, or 3.2%, of all deaths and accounts for 4.0% of the disease burden (WHO, 200; 2007). This is of great concern in Uganda which has one of the highest estimated per capita consumption of alcohol world-wide.

FORMULATION OF BY-LAWS AGAINST ALCOHOL USE

Alcohol is the number one drug of choice for young people in Uganda, and is more likely to kill young people than all illegal drugs combined. The three Sub-Counties i.e (Nabweru, Nangabo and Busukuuma of Wakiso District - Uganda) through the political councillors and consultations with the communities formulated by-laws (PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM ALCOHOL and NATIVE LIQUOR - BY-LAW, 2015) to address the problem of increasing cases of underage alcohol drinking. The communities were engaged through village meetings; sensitisation meetings of the political councillors; engagement of legal personnel during the drafting of the alcohol by-laws; review of the draft by-laws and approval by the respective councils in Nabweru, Busukuma and Nangabo Sub-Counties.

1. The following practices are prohibited:-
   (a) **NO** free promotion and distribution of alcohol to **CHILDREN**;
   (b) **NO** admission of **CHILDREN** into video halls/“bibandas”, bars and other entertainment places;
   (c) **NO** sending and selling alcohol to **CHILDREN**;
   (d) **NO** employment of **CHILDREN** in the business of selling, promotion and distribution of alcohol;
   (e) **NO** selling **ALCOHOL** to any person within working hours;
   (f) **NO** selling **ALCOHOL** to any
2. **NO** bar shall be located within the radius of less than **500 metres** from a school or other Child related Centres.

3. Any person or entity engaging in the business of selling, distribution and promotion of **ALCOHOL SHALL BE** required to seek a second license as required under the Trade Licensing Act.

4. a). **ANY PERSON** who contravenes any section of this Sub county Bye-Law, commits an offence; and shall be summoned to appear before the Council Court of the Division and/or shall be subjected to any of the following:-

(i) Such person’s second license to operate the business of selling alcohol may be suspended.

(ii) The property or alcohol in these premises may be confiscated.

(iii) Such person may be subjected to Community Service and or,

(iv) Any other sanction within the Committee’s limits as it may deem fit.

**7 Points to consider:**

1. **Alcohol Industry targeting children in Uganda.**

The alcohol industry has targeted children and young people through the proliferation and packaging of alcohol tot packs/sachets in lowest quantities of 30mls and cheap pricing of about Ugx200. This alcohol is very cheap; easy to conceal; accessible to minors and consequently young people (10 - 24 years) are increasingly getting hooked to alcohol. The burden posed by alcohol in future appears to be out of control and its impact will pose a huge financial and social cost in the near future.

Children have been targeted by the alcohol industry through extensive marketing on television / radio / magazines / newspapers and outdoor advertising, public places such as supermarkets, markets, road side promotions with free distribution of alcohol in public places and social events, placing billboards near schools. The intention is to recruit more teens to drink and expand the markets and profit margins.

Conventional wisdom has it that for a belief to survive it must have new entrants and followers and this is what small, affordable packages of alcohol with attractive color shades seem to achieve for the alcohol industry; get as many children as possible as potential consumers and sustainers of the industry.

**Mystery shopping Evaluation:**

The results of the mystery shopping research in Kampala in 2011, revealed non-compliance of alcohol selling points to the legal age restriction of 18 years. None of the alcohol selling points asked for the age and identification of the children buying alcohol.

**Table 1: Percentage of Compliance of alcohol selling points**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of alcohol sales point</th>
<th>Amount of visits</th>
<th>Number of times of compliance</th>
<th>Compliance rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little shop</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Supermarket</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar or Pub</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discotheque</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Alcohol marketing on Radio/TV:**

Alcohol marketing influences youths attitudes about alcohol and intentions to consume alcoholic beverages (Fleming *et al.*, 2004; Wyllie *et al.*, 1998).

A MAMPA 2011 study recorded and analyzed two radio channels for 24 hours on a week day and on a weekend day. In the 24 hours monitored, a total of 91 alcohol advertisements were found. There were equally many alcohol editorials in newspapers; television commercials are broadcast in blocks and clustered in and around sports and music programs.
Advertisements usually increase young people’s likelihood of starting to drink. Cheap alcohol in form of price promotions are associated with increased binge drinking.

There is need to:-
- Regulate unethical advertising, and marketing of alcohol targeting children.
- Regulate opening and selling time and places of sale of alcohol.
- A complete ban on sachets and only allow plastic bottle packaging not less than 200mls.
- An Alcohol advertising regulation code should be put in place.

UYDEL 2014 study covering 1,134 slum youths in Kampala 12 - 18 years showed over:-
- 411 slum adolescents 37% drink alcohol.
- 69% start at age 14 years (have been introduced to alcohol)
- 57% drink more than twice a week.
- Only 17% had ever sought help.
- Condoms significantly comes down at 50% because partners drink and do not want to use condoms.

In UYDEL’S study 411 (36%) of the youth surveyed drank alcohol. The biggest source of alcohol was from a friend or their sex partner. 18% of the children had been offered free alcohol by a company representative in bars or music gala. Depressed mood was also quite common 15% reported feeling sad and hopeless, 35% had thought of hurting themselves and 24% had thought of killing themselves.

- 26% had been slapped by partners because were drunk.
- 51% have had 1 - 2 sexual partners another 25% 3 - 4 partners.

50% drink 2 or more times per week
47% of youth obtain alcohol from a friend
73% drink alcohol with their friends
26% prefer drinking alcohol in sachets
The conditions in the urban slums are worrying 41% (live in one room) and 22% are homeless.

These results provide evidence that increased comprehensive and multi-level prevention and intervention services focus on this vulnerable population in trying to delay their alcohol use and address the underlying determinants of substance used to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Breweries investments Vs brewers cost to Uganda’s economy

One of the major lie when breweries post their investments in the country they usually ask for lower tax regimes as they argue this will improve their competitions.

The other lies usually peddled by the alcohol industry are that the economy will suffer if government regulates alcohol production, sale and consumption. The employment of many people should not be used as a ploy against alcohol regulation. The industry also states that they use local materials, and thus boosting local farmers/economy but this also affects the food economy of the very households that engage in growing local materials. Bars and other related business will confess that selling of alcohol is labor intensive and bars have the highest turnover of staff and losses in the country.

The arrogance of the industry that it pays a lot of taxes and promotes responsible drinking is a mere fallacy. The Alcohol industry recruits and appoints former senior government and private officials on their boards as a way of lobbying government not to enact effective alcohol policies and regulations.

The industry posts billions of profits as it targets the poor and those in middle class. For all these years the breweries have kept this a secret not disclose the huge costs and injuries that arise from consumption of their product.
Alcohol Industry activities and tactics:

The industry argues that profits from alcohol are reinvested in marketing, used to lobby and corporate social responsibility. They have set up social aspect organizations that oppose effective policies and luring NGOs to do their prevention work. They are also promoting ineffective measure and oppose effective measure. For example voluntary codes of advertising, self regulation.

Promotion of “Drink responsibly” messages - to put focus and responsibility for harm on the drinker and not the product.

In Uganda they were hijacking active general engagement in alcohol policy arena by influencing the drafting of policy, lobbying, political donations, and publishing (misrepresentation of facts and weak evidence), sponsoring conferences, research policy development especially in emerging markets and support for NGOs.

Economic cost of consuming alcohol

When people drink more its affects the economic productivity of individuals which implies less work, savings and less investments in the country thus vicious cycle of poverty, violence, food shortage and crime. Treatment costs rise in hospitals (as more that 200 diseases associated with use of alcohol WHO, 2013) and large sums of money are spent on individuals during hospitalization, rehabilitation and treatment of addicts and victims of road carnage. (The profits posted by the industry should be deducted by 5% put in endowment fund and used to pay for treatment, research, rehabilitation and awareness and other huge costs associated with alcohol product) The police cost, judiciary and enforcement costs rise and money which would rather be invested in education, economy and health is taken up to curb alcohol related crimes.

Money saved by people giving up drinking can be reinvested in more productive work if alcohol is regulated. Where so there is not net loss on income and investments and wealth can be redistributed equally across on board. Uganda loses over 100 billion Uganda shillings due to high alcohol burden (treatment, crime).

3 Alcohol as an Agent of Harm to others

Intimate partner violence (physical aggression, sexual rape and psychological abuse alcohol is cause number one (48%) of all abuses in Uganda.

Alcohol consumption is highly correlated to HIV/AIDS infection. Road accident and the cost of road traffic enforcement and medical bills are going up. The more the frequency, of alcohol consumption the more the likelihood for committing crime [violence] against your partner. Various categories of criminal behaviour have been identified as having alcohol links such as homicide, domestic violence, other assaults, sexual violence, and child abuse. A strong link between alcohol use, crime and violence has been established.

Alcohol is the third largest contributor to death and disability after unsafe sex/sexually transmitted infections and interpersonal violence. The three largest contributors to the burden specifically related to alcohol included homicide and violence (40% of alcohol’s burden), alcohol use disorders (15%) and road traffic injuries (15%) and weaker generation that can’t contribute more to the economy.
University Students and Alcohol abuse

In 2010, UYDEL initiated a study on alcohol use, sexual risk behaviour and violence among students in 4 selected universities in Kampala covering 264 students. Out of 264 students interviewed, more than half were male (72%). A big proportion of the respondents (96.5%) were below the age of 30 years save for a few (3.4%). Most respondents (78%) lived off campus with their families, in hostels or with spouses/partners.

Drinking behaviour:

Three quarters of the students (76.5%) had their first drink between 15-20 years, while another (30%) had it before age 14, pointing to early exposure/drinking of alcohol. Most of the students were introduced to alcohol by friends/peers (57%). This indicates the significant role of peers in initiating and sustaining the drinking of alcohol.

Alcohol consumption and risky behaviour:

Thirty-seven per cent of the students reported having sex while drunk and another 23.5% reported failing to use a condom during sex because they were drunk. The reasons why students go ahead and drink despite being aware of alcohol-related harm is an issue that requires further research.

Problem drinking greatly increases the possibility of engaging in risky sexual behaviour including unprotected sex, sex with casual partners, and sex with older partners for money to sustain the drinking habit and multiple sex partners. All these have been linked to the increased spread of HIV/AIDS among young people. Alcohol consumption is part of the behaviour profile of university students among both males and females. Robust efforts to address alcohol exposure at university be initiated and marketing of the alcoholic products at during bazaars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended lectures while drunk</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>33.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had sex when drunk (n=253)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>37.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed to use condom when drunk (n=160)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>23.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has been assaulted by partner (n=152)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbally abused by partner (n=152)</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>36.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually abused (n=152)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used abusive language (n=167)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>20.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarreled with someone (n=167)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fought someone (n=167)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Drink Driving and Road accidents

National accidents statistics from Police records indicate that; In 2009, 5.6% of the total numbers of road crashes registered countrywide were due to driving under the influence of alcohol.

From January 2012 to March 2013, 2,320 suspected drunken motorists took breathalyzer tests at 11 police
stations. The table below shows the numbers of those charged with various offences.

**Table 3: Road accidents over five years (2005-2009) in Kampala area.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Fatal</th>
<th>Serious</th>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>3,056</td>
<td>6,417</td>
<td>9,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3,070</td>
<td>5,883</td>
<td>9,253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>3,803</td>
<td>6,484</td>
<td>10,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>4,725</td>
<td>7,156</td>
<td>12,446</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Police Annual Crime reports and KBS paper presentations*

6 Alcohol and food shortages

There have been concerted efforts by major brewery companies to expand their markets so they are turning to food crops as major raw material to cut costs and improve their profits. The tax break that the industry has received in the past is one of the biggest tactics the breweries have used to keep the general population and key government people blinded about the devastating effects of alcohol on the country. Turning to major food crops to make beer has started to interfere with food security in Uganda. Household heads are selling all their food to get money and end up using it to buy premier cheap beer and other local gins. Because husbands (and wives) are spending more time drinking alcohol, consumption is seriously affecting their contribution in terms of digging and planning for food production. Most of their productive time is spent drinking and then nursing hangovers.

7 Alcohol Poisoning, Deaths and Homicides

Approximately 40 cases of deaths due to drinking adulterated ‘waragi’ packed in sachets were first reported in March 2007 and close to 300 people are reported to have lost their lives due to alcohol poisoning between 2007-2009. In September 2009, the government and Ministry of Health imposed a ban on local gin (‘waragi’) throughout the country after the death of about 19 people who are believed to have consumed alcohol (‘waragi’) containing methanol, a potent spirit.

In response to the outbreak, the Minister of Health constituted a multi-sectoral task force consisting of officers from various institutions including Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) to investigate the reported outbreak and recommend measures to contain the situation as well as prevent re-occurrence of the incidence. Cases of deaths and blindness were reported in different parts of the country mainly in Kasese, Kampala, Kabarole, Gulu and Mpigi districts. Their symptoms, according to local authorities included; vomiting, diarrhea and swollen stomachs.

Packaging of alcohol in sachets some as low as 30mls has made drinking appear easy; it’s very cheap, easy to conceal; accessible to minors and makes it difficult for government to trace the origins of the adulterated ‘waragi’. To date all these efforts were abandoned and the industry is back at rampage.

Alcohol packed in Polythene packs (sachets)

Alcohol in polythene packs (sachets) is easy to package and adulterate and yet there is very limited capacity to carry out chemical analysis tests. In essence poisoning could go on for a long time without being detected.

The small packages of alcohol have become an avenue for recruitment of children into drinking alcohol. It is not unusual scene to encounter motorcycle transport operators, tax drivers and other workers of all categories concealing and consuming sachets.
The Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS) investigations confirmed that brands of waragi produced and registered with the Standards body were safe for consumption. According to a UNBS report, samples collected from Kabale had levels of methanol of between 170 - 300 more times the allowable limit. The maximum allowable level of methanol in ‘waragi’ is 0.05 percent M/V. There is no approved distillery in Kabale and many new factories have emerged and this ‘waragi’ may be unsafe for consumption.

Over 100 people were reported to have been admitted at various health centers and hospitals in Kabale district at the time - though consumption of the adulterated alcohol was still high. District Councils responded by banning the sale of deadly gin with immediate effect (see Table 4).

Table 4: Showing numbers of reported deaths and blindness due to adulterated alcohol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>Reported Blind</th>
<th>Reported Dead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>“State Of Alcohol Abuse In Uganda” Young People Drinking Deeper Into Poverty, UYDEL, 2008. 100 people were poisoned in 2007 by illicit alcohol brewed by an illegal factory in Mubende district due to lack of information about illegal production of adulterated alcohol. The factory was closed down in 2007 and its proprietors arrested and taken to court.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100 (Poisoned)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>“New vision, Friday 21st August 2009” 10,000 Litres of Enguli impounded; (Lopeyok &amp; Lake in at Nakapiriti police station).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>“Saturday Vision, 11th April 2009” In February 2007 over 40 people died in Kampala and other districts after drinking toxic ‘Waragi’ packed in polythene sachets of 25ml and 30ml and sold for shilling 100. The ‘Waragi’ had a lot of methanol, the Health Ministry announced.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>WBS and New Vision- 28th /08/2009 Kulambiro.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>NTV News 31st /08/2009 Mpigi district</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>New Vision 1st/Sept/2009 - “Waragi kills eight more people” bringing the number of deaths to 16 in last 2 weeks.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>New Vision, 22nd April 2010- “Waragi victims named”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Daily Monitor, 23rd April 2010 - “ Waragi death toll rises to 80 in Kabale”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Daily Monitor, 29th April 2010 - “Waragi death toll rises to 20 in Kamwenge”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The New Vision, 12th May 2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Cases 42 329
Implication of the statistics and deaths above

Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS), a body charged with the responsibility of determining, formulating and enforcing standards of alcohol is overburdened. It is not doing enough within its mandate to enforce existing legislations and monitor the types of alcohol sold on the market. That’s why everyone can wake up and start brewing illicit poisonous alcohol from their homes. UNBS must be supported to address unadulterated local gin.

A separate National Alcohol Board be put in place to enforce as provided by Enguli act. (See analysis of Enguli Act 1965).

Government needs also to see alcohol related harm in terms of morbidity (general ill health of the population) but rather view it in terms of mortality (number of deaths).

Alcohol brewers want to satisfy their customer needs by increasing the alcohol potency to produce the desired outcome faster hence the use of methanol in alcohol.

Urgent Actions / Recommendations

Immediate measures

(a) Government should declare a total ban of packaging alcohol in sachet and only be packed in plastic bottles with a minimum of 250mls as provided in the national standards governing packing of food and drinks.

(b) Ban the display and free distribution of alcohol products at public places and social events where Children are part.

(c) Ban the use of children in all alcohol trade activities.

Long term Measures

(a) Put in place an interim multi sectorial ministerial National Alcohol Board as provided by Enguli Act. (See analysis of Enguli Act 1965 to undertake a review and make recommendations for updating the alcohol law Enguli act.)

(b) Propose in consultation with all stakeholders draft an Alcohol Policy free from the industry bias to help step drinking vice.

(c) Some Districts have passed ordinances and Bi-laws to regulate alcohol and these tools can be effective and Ministry of trade and other areas need to learn and Ministry of trade can find the best way forward to use them

(d) Put in place a functional Alcohol board at national and district level funded by the endowment fund to enforce the law.

(e) Establishment of an endowment fund of 5% tax from alcohol beverages sold to benefit prevention, rehabilitation, research, education and enforce regulations.

References:-