

The Bagwere, located in the eastern districts of Pallisa, Budaka, Kibuku, and Butebo, once known for strong communal values, discipline, and respect for elders, are facing a crisis of moral degradation among youth.

BY MUDANGHA KOLYANGHA

In a dusty trading centre in the eastern district of Pallisa, a group of teenagers is gathered around a smartphone, laughing loudly at a viral TikTok video. Just a few metres away, an elderly man passes by, shaking his head in disbelief.

"These are not the children we raised," he mutters. "They have no shame, no respect, and no fear of God."

Across the Bukedi region, stretching through Budaka-Butebo, Pallisa, and Kibuku, and indeed throughout the entire country, a growing sense of concern is spreading among parents, teachers, cultural leaders, and religious leaders.

They say the youth are losing their moral compass, a situation partly attributed to the importation of Western practices.

Once a society guided by respect, honesty, and communal responsibility, Bukedi now confronts a painful question: What happened to our values? A generation appears to be in moral crisis. In schools, the situation is no different, with rising cases of indiscipline. At home, conversations between parents and children have grown distant. Churches and mosques report dwindling youth participation, while social ills such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, and petty crime continue to rise.

Ms Beatrice Namukose, a mother of five in Kibuku District, recalls how family unity once shaped the moral foundation of young people.

"In our days, if you misbehaved, any elder could correct you," she says. "Now, if you talk to someone's child, the parent accuses you of interference. We have lost that bond that used to hold us together."

That broken bond between generations lies at the heart of Bukedi's moral decline. With parents struggling to earn a living, many children grow up without consistent guidance.

The traditional values of respect, honesty, and community accountability have drastically faded, if not disappeared entirely.

Economic challenges in the region have made the situation worse. Many young people in Bukedi face unemployment, poor access to education, and limited opportunities.

Desperation has driven some into gambling, substance abuse, or petty theft.

"It's hard to teach morals to a person who has nothing to eat. Many of them believe morality doesn't help in life because even the rich break the rules and succeed," says Geoffrey Mulekwa, a senior mentor.

This belief, that corruption and shortcuts bring success, has quietly taken root.

Role models are scarce, and the moral lessons once emphasised by elders now compete with the loud, seductive voices of social media influencers and pop

Concern over moral decline among Bukedi region youth



Youth dance as they drink alcohol and smoke shisha. PHOTO/FILE

culture icons.

In Bukedi's urban centres, smartphones have become the new classrooms of culture. Young people now learn more from the internet than from their parents or teachers.

Mr James Mwidu, 60, a resident of Budaka, notes with concern that moral decay has eroded respect to the point that children no longer listen to their elders.

"The young generation doesn't understand that elders have words of wisdom. Because they are wholly engaged on social media, their minds have shifted in a different direction," Mr Mwidu explains.

He adds, "We elders are their godfathers, but these young people have sidelined their parents and elders within the community."

He says many youth engage in harmful acts such as drug and alcohol abuse.

He further observes that young people have become self-centred, detached from the community obligations that once defined adulthood.

Religious leaders are equally alarmed. Rev Fred Gadala, the parish priest of

Spiritual roots.
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Jami Parish, Budaka Archdeaconry in Bukedi Diocese, says the moral crisis has spiritual roots.

"Young people no longer fear God," he says. "They come to church for weddings, not for the Word. We are losing the spiritual discipline that anchored our morality."

Once, Sunday schools and youth fellowships played a key role in moral formation. Today, attendance has dropped sharply. Many youth, drawn by modern entertainment and economic hustles,

consider religion outdated or restrictive.

The education system is not exempt from blame. While schools emphasise academic excellence, moral education has been reduced to brief religious lessons or guidance sessions.

Teachers are overwhelmed, and discipline, once the cornerstone of learning, has weakened under pressure from human rights concerns and changing parental attitudes.

Mr Eriya Poli, the head teacher of Budaka Family Project, says despite producing brilliant students, schools today are not necessarily producing good citizens. "The moral training that used to shape character is missing," he says.

Local leaders have called for stronger parental involvement and the reintroduction of moral studies in schools.

As dusk settles, Mr Wilson Lyadda sits outside his home watching his grandchildren play. He smiles faintly, though with a hint of sadness.

"The world has changed," he says softly. "But if we lose our morals, we lose everything that makes us human."

His words echo the sentiments of many across the region, a plea for the young generation to reconnect with the values that once defined their people: respect for elders, love for truth, and unity of purpose.

He recalls how people once gathered under trees to reminisce about "the good old days", when greeting an elder reflected good upbringing, when communal work united villages, and when respect and restraint defined youth character. But those days, many say, are fading fast.

"Tradition is losing the fight," he stresses. "Our customs taught respect, discipline, and humility. Now modern life teaches shortcuts, showing off, and self-interest."

He says traditional systems once served as moral compasses. The extended family ensured children grew up guided by multiple elders.

Today, these cultural pillars are crumbling. Many youth consider traditional practices "old-fashioned" or "backward," influenced by modern education, urban lifestyles, and global trends.

Economic struggles have also forced many parents into long hours of work or migration to urban areas, leaving children with minimal supervision.

"The communal upbringing that once shaped moral behaviour is no longer practiced," he says.

Mr James Kaigo, 72, an opinion leader, agrees: "Children are growing up without moral mentorship. Parents no longer tell stories around the fire or teach proverbs. The television and phone have replaced family conversations."

With this disconnect, youth now learn more from peers than parents, often absorbing questionable attitudes about sex, money, and authority.

Mr Badru Kirya, the chairperson of the Cultural Council in Obwa Ikumbania Bwa Bugwere, says indecent dressing is not only a sign of indiscipline but also a threat to cultural and religious values.

"The dress code today has put our cultural values to the test. People are almost walking naked. This trend must be checked," he says.

Mr Kirya calls for self-respect among young people and urges parents to

BUKEDI STATISTICS

According to the 2024 National Population and Housing Census, Bukedi Sub-region, which includes Tororo, Budaka, Kibuku, Butaleja, Pallisa, Butebo, and Bunyole East has a high youth unemployment rate.

At least 37.1 percent of those aged 15 to 24 are not in employment, education, or training.

The labour force participation rate for persons aged 15 and over is 31.4 percent and the unemployment rate is 9.2 percent.

The census recorded a household population of 1,981,247 and non-household residents numbering 30,778, bringing the total population to 2,012,025. Children under 18 years account for 50.7 percent of the population, while adults aged 18 and above are 49.3 percent.

adopt patient and accommodating approaches when teaching morals.

"The children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, and disrespect for elders. They prefer chatter to meaningful engagement. They no longer rise when elders enter the room," Mr Kirya adds.

The Bagwere, located in the eastern districts of Pallisa, Budaka, Kibuku, and Butebo, once known for strong communal values, discipline, and respect for elders, are facing a growing crisis. Moral degradation among youth has become a topic of heated discussion in churches, mosques, schools, and homes.

"We are worried that moral degradation has reached unprecedented levels. We have totally lost the generation," says Mr Kirya.

"In our time, a young person feared even raising their voice before an elder. Today, they curse, fight, and spend days on their phones. Respect is gone."

At the core of the problem, Mr Kirya says, is the weakening of family structures. Parenting was communal; a child belonged to everyone. Elders played a strong role in shaping moral character.

He adds that exposure to pornography, and changes in the school syllabus have also contributed to the moral decline.

"Schools used to teach dos and don'ts. Under the current system, those lessons are no longer in the syllabus," he says.

The Bishop of Bukedi Diocese, Rt Rev Samuel George Bogere Egesa, has repeatedly decried the alarming levels of moral decay among the youth during his pastoral visits.

Pallisa LC5 chairperson, Mr Patrick Duchu, echoes the same concerns, stating that many young people in the productive age bracket are engaged in alcohol abuse, drug use, and other harmful activities.

"It's high time we engaged this productive population in viable enterprises to keep them fully occupied and reduce time wasted on non-productive activities," he says.

editorial@ug.nationmedia.com