

BY DENIS EDEMA

**JINJA:** As dawn breaks over Jinja City, a silent workforce is already on the move. It is groups of street children combing through bins and roadside dumps, collecting plastic bottles, boxes and scrap paper, turning the city's waste into a lifeline for food and survival.

By afternoon, their sacks are heavy with bottles and paper, which they later sort and sell to local buyers who supply factories in bulk. Many of these are from the slum community of Kikaramoja, a settlement of Karimojong families that migrated from Napak, Katakwi, and Moroto districts searching for better opportunities.

Most settled in Soweto and Masese II in Jinja City's Southern Division. Living in poorly constructed shelters and faced with limited employment opportunities, many parents struggle to afford school fees.

As a result, some children end up on the streets to support themselves and their families, while others sort produce such as maize, groundnuts, beans, and rice in local stores.

Although poverty and hardship have pushed them into this life, the children

# How Jinja's street children are keeping the city clean

demonstrate resilience and enterprise beyond their years.

Through their daily hustle, they quietly contribute to keeping Jinja's streets cleaner while fighting for survival one bottle at a time.

Today, a walk through the city's streets and corridors rarely reveals discarded plastic bottles or boxes, a visible sign of their impact.

Ms Victoria Kakaire, the Principal Environment Officer for Jinja City, said some street children are directly contributing to reducing plastic waste.

"Keeping the environment clean is everyone's responsibility. It is encouraging to see some street children see the value in plastic bottles and boxes. This is a great milestone toward a clean city," Ms Kakaire said.

She added that she has observed some boys assisting on garbage collection trucks, sorting plastics before loading, an initiative she highly recommended.

Mr Henry Batambuze, LCI chairperson of Main Street East, also praised the street children's work. He said, late-

ly, Jinja City's corridors and streets are less littered.

Ms Kakaire revealed that there are plans to acquire a machine that will convert waste into useful products such as organic manure, briquettes for fuel, recycled plastic materials, and other reusable items, a move expected to transform the city's waste management system.

Late last year, the Jinja City Council proposed bylaws aimed at promoting responsible waste disposal, holding offenders accountable, and encouraging residents and visitors to keep the city clean.

Ms Isabella Ndahura, Deputy City Clerk of Jinja City, said the absence of clear and enforceable anti-littering laws has significantly contributed to poor waste management, especially along major roads, taxi parks, and other busy areas.

The chairperson of Alidina Road Village, Mr Vin Lawrence Semaganda, praised plastic bottle pickers for improving cleanliness in the city.

He noted that large amounts of gar-

## PRICES OF WASTE

At collection points, one kilogram of plastic bottles and soft polythene paper costs Shs700, while one kilogram of boxes is sold at Shs300. A drum of organic waste, including cassava peels and potatoes, costs Shs10,000. Factory prices vary depending on the plastic type and bulk purchases. On average, broken plastic chairs cost Shs2,900 per kilogram.

bage are collected daily from the business centre, including the central market, and waste collection has quietly become a source of income within the community.

Mr Semaganda, who holds a garbage collection tender under Cheedlah Investment U Ltd, said various categories of waste are now in high demand.

"Farmers buy organic waste like cassava and potato peels to rear armyworms

and maggots for feed, use leaves and husks for mulching, while we sell plastics and cloth to ready buyers."

He allows his workers to sort market waste, giving them extra income while promoting recycling of organic materials, plastics, and cloth.

Mr Semaganda said buyers provide containers for storing the sorted waste and pick it every evening.

Some street children, whose identities have been withheld because they are minors, said they earn a steady income from collecting plastic bottles, boxes, and soft polythene papers.

One child explained that they divide the waste types among themselves to avoid conflict while searching for recyclable materials.

"We return home with between Shs5,000 and Shs8,000 daily. Some of our parents or guardians depend on this money to take care of us and buy food. That is why many of us are not in school, although we admire school going children," she said.