

# Commission fights for the marginalised

By Betty Amamukirori

In March 2017, Alice Pikwo, an employee with Nile coaches, a bus company, was abruptly terminated by her supervisor with no explanation. They had not paid her for three months.

Her efforts to inquire into her sudden termination and get her three month salary hit a snag. No one could explain to her what she had done wrong. As a vehicle inspector, she was earning sh150,000 per month.

"They had stopped me from working for no reason. Even when I went to them several times, they refused to pay me my money.

The supervisor could not even listen to me. He was so arrogant," she told *New Vision* in an interview.

Pikwo said after the several failed attempts to get her pay, a friend advised her to file her complaint with the Equal Opportunities' Commission (EOC).

In June 2017, she filed her complaint and after four months of mitigation between her and her former employer, she was finally paid.

"Those people (EOC) helped me. They were so



Ntambi

sympathetic," she said.

Sheila Ajo the public relations officer, EOC says they receive a minimum of 15 cases of a similar nature every month.

"We handle those that fall under our docket and refer the others to the relevant bodies such as the Human Rights Commission," she said.

Sylvia Ntambi, the chairperson EOC, says 51% of the complaints they receive are from women while 49% were filed by men.

She adds that most of the complaints arise from the central region.

Ntambi explains that as EOC, they are committed to redressing social imbalances in the Ugandan Society.

This year, Labour Day will be celebrated under the theme *Promoting the Public Spirit in the Public Sector*.

Ntambi noted that this



Tea picking may be seen as one of the activities for the marginalised

year's theme augurs well with the national constitutional obligation of the Commission of eliminating discrimination and marginalisation against any individual or groups of persons by redressing societal imbalances through taking affirmative action and promoting equal opportunities for all.

"To this end, the commission envisions a just and fair society wherein all persons have equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life," she said.

Ntambi explained that to fulfil this vision, they have been able to receive, assess and investigate complaints and determine their merit based admissibility or inadmissibility in light of the Commissions mandate.

She notes that the EOC's mandate is to eliminate all forms of discrimination, marginalisation and promote equal opportunities for all.

"Complaints outside our mandate are referred to other relevant institutions. The admissible complaints usually take the form of alternative dispute resolution, before

engaging the Commission's Tribunal," she further said.

Ntambi stated that they are also conducting research studies and audits on the dynamics of inequalities, discrimination and marginalisation among the population; and making policy recommendations on action areas to address imbalances and promote equal opportunities for all.

She said some of the concluded studies address salient aspects as salary disparities in the public service and level of access and delivery of health

services, accessibility to the built environment in public and private institutions and facilities, the status of women in employment in the public sector and the status of marginalised groups in decision-making processes.

She said some of these audits focused on the Youth Livelihood Programme, Social Assistance Grant for Empowerment for older persons and Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme.

Ntambi says they are also carrying out gender and equity compliance assessments to ensure that all government plans and budgets address the development concerns of marginalised populations and disadvantaged areas for purposes of realising a sustainable inclusive development.

In addition to EOC is educating State and non-state actors, including individual discriminated persons about the Commission and its mandate, as well as broadening development concepts of equal opportunity, affirmative action, gender and equity mainstreaming and inclusive development.