

OAFLA UGANDA

REPORT of THE EMTCT CAMPAIGN



Central Region- Masaka

1st September 2015

Table of Contents

Acronyms	3
1.0 Background.....	4
2.0 Stakeholders Consultative Meeting	7
2.1 Remarks by the Executive Director OAFLA Uganda	7
2.2 Statement of Commitment on EMTCT from Religious and Cultural Leaders.....	8
2.3 Discussion on Engaging Religious and Cultural Leaders in the EMTCT Response	9
2.4 Presentation of a Report on the Status of EMTCT in the Central Region	12
2.5 Remarks by the UNAIDS Country Director	13
2.6 Remarks by the US Ambassador to Uganda	14
2.7 Remarks by the Hon Minister of Health	14
2.8 Remarks by the National EMTCT Champion	16
3.0 The Public Rally	18
3.1 Remarks by the LC I Chairperson.....	18
3.2 Presentations on the HIV and EMTCT Response	18
3.3 Remarks by the Chairperson of the Towns and LCV Chairman Masaka District	19
3.4 Remarks by the Pokino of Buddu Kabaka Representative.....	19
3.5 Remarks by the Director General Health Services MOH.....	19
3.6 Remarks by the Chairperson of AIDS Development Partners	20
3.7 Remarks by the US Ambassador	21
3.8 Country Representative UNICEF	22
3.9 Remarks by the District Woman MP Masaka	23
3.10 Remarks by the National EMTCT Champion	24
3.11 Handover of the Masaka District Ambulance and Mobile Clinic.....	25
4.0 Conclusion.....	25

Acronyms

AMMICAAL	Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV AND AIDS in Africa, Uganda Chapter
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DHO	District Health Officer
EMTCT	Elimination of Mother To Child Transmission
HCT	HIV and AIDS Counseling and Testing
MNH	Maternal and Neonatal Health
MOH	Ministry of Health
MTCT	Mother To Child Transmission
NMS	National Medical Stores
OAFLA	Organisation of African First Ladies Against HIV AND AIDS
SMS	Safe Male Circumcision
UAC	Uganda AIDS Commission
VHTs	Village Health Teams

1.0 Background

The HIV Programme of the First Lady's Office in Uganda operates as the Uganda Chapter of the Organisation of African First Ladies against HIV and AIDS in Africa (OAFLA). OAFLA Uganda is committed to contributing to efforts towards an AIDS free Africa.

The Uganda Chapter (OAFLA Uganda) is guided by the following Vision and Mission:

Vision: Zero new infections leading to an HIV Free Generation by 2020.

Mission: To provide political leadership and a strategic platform for stakeholder engagement and community mobilization, to ensure an effective HIV and AIDS response; towards an HIV free generation.

Origins of the EMTCT Campaign

The First Lady was nominated the National EMTCT Champion in August 2012 and thereafter she embarked on Regional Campaigns to create awareness about EMTCT. These Campaigns are organised and coordinated by OAFLA Uganda in partnership with the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Uganda AIDS Commission (UAC), HIV/EMTCT stakeholders and the political leadership at all levels of society.

The Campaigns have created general awareness about effective HIV/EMTCT service delivery and specifically the need for leadership involvement, starting with male involvement in the family reproductive health. They have succeeded in: engaging key stakeholders in consultations around EMTCT, creating awareness about the Option B plus and stepping up the availability of commodities in the regions' reached.

This is a report of the 10th EMTCT Regional Campaign in the Central Region held on 1st September 2015. The Campaign covered 21 Districts.

Activities organised to mark the Central Region EMTCT Campaign

A number of activities were organised as part of the Regional Campaign, some of which are detailed below:

- **Media Campaigns:** The public were kept informed about the Campaign activities through various programmes aired on radio stations in the Region. These

included talk shows hosting Opinion Leaders as well as Implementing Partners operating in the Region. The programmes provided messages on EMTCT and HIV and AIDS.

- **HIV and AIDS /EMTCT Services:** Service delivery was scaled up by stocking commodities in all the Health Centers IV's and III's and through the implementation of outreach services. The people in the Region were able to access services such as: HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT), family planning, condom distribution, Safe Male Circumcision (SMC), Antenatal Care, Moonlight Clinics and Cervical Cancer Testing.
- **The Religious and Cultural Leaders Dialogue on EMTCT:** The Religious and Cultural Leaders Dialogue on EMTCT was organised as one of the Campaign activities to sensitise Religious and Cultural leaders on key aspects of the HIV and EMTCT Response, as well as to enable them discuss their role in mobilizing communities to access health services.



A group photo of cultural and religious leaders after the workshop

Stakeholder's Consultative Meeting and the Public Rally: A Stakeholder's Consultative Meeting was held at the State Lodge Masaka. Discussions were held on the EMTCT Status Report for the Central Region as well as Best Practices and Strategies for Engaging Religious and Cultural Leaders in the HIV and EMTCT Response. Thereafter the National EMTCT Champion addressed the general public at a rally held at the Liberation Grounds Masaka.

- **Handing Over of the Masaka District Mobile Clinic and Ambulance Service:** The EMTCT Champion handed over the Masaka District Mobile Clinic and Ambulance Service to the DHO and the District Councilor representing PWDs. The Ambulance was bought by the Woman District MP Mrs. Mubanda.



A group picture after the handover of the Ambulance by the First Lady

- **Testimonies from People Living with HIV and AIDS (PWLHA):** People Living with HIV and AIDS made presentations to the First Lady and National EMTCT Champion in song and testimonies; depicting their experiences of living with HIV as well as their EMTCT success stories.

Outcomes of the EMTCT Central Region Campaign:

The Central Region EMTCT Campaign was the largest of the 10 campaigns held country wide having covered 21 Districts. The Campaign once again enabled the Leadership of these districts to hear messages on EMTCT and HIV and AIDs and to mobilize their communities to actively participate in accessing various health services.

The region witnessed a great partnership and effort in the scaling up of services and the availability of commodities in support of the EMTCT Response in the Region. A key highlight of the Campaign was the Dialogue on EMTCT for Religious and Cultural Leaders that provided opportunity for the dissemination of technical information on the Status of HIV in the Region and a discussion on practical approaches by the Religious and Cultural Leaders to build partnerships with other stakeholders in the health sector and to mobilise and engage their communities.

Stakeholders Consultative Meeting

A Stakeholder's Consultative Meeting was held on the morning of the Launch of the Central Region EMTCT Campaign at the State Lodge Masaka. The Meeting was attended by the Minister of State for Agriculture who represented the Minister of Health, MPs, Political leaders, Officials from the Ministry of Health, UN Heads of Missions, Development Partners, CSOs, key actors in the health sector, members of the business community as well as cultural and religious leaders.

The objectives of the Stakeholder's Consultative Meeting were to:

- Provide a Forum for key stakeholders in the EMTCT Response to share information regarding EMTCT and HIV AND AIDS in general.
- Discuss on Engaging Religious and Cultural leaders in the EMTCT Response.

Below is a brief account of the deliberations of the Meeting.

The Meeting was opened with a word of prayer and thereafter the Executive Director OAFLA Uganda welcomed the stakeholders and shared the objective of the Meeting. She gave a background to the EMTCT Campaigns and then guided the stakeholders through a discussion on: *"Best practices and strategies for engaging Religious and Cultural leaders in the HIV and EMTCT Response"*.

After the group discussions the First Lady was received by the Executive Director OAFLA Uganda who then gave her opening remarks.

Remarks by the Executive Director OAFLA Uganda

The Executive Director OAFLA Uganda Mrs. Beat Bisangwa welcomed the National Champion EMTCT to the Stakeholders Meeting and applauded her for her personal commitment to participating in all the Campaigns conducted country wide saying: "Mama Janet thank you for coming once again. Once again thank you for your unwavering commitment to Uganda's babies and the future of our nation".

She drew the Meetings attention to the genesis of the Regional EMTCT Campaigns which she said is a journey that began in August 2012 with the nomination of the First Lady as the National EMTCT Champion. This was followed by the First EMTCT Campaign launched in March 2013, which has since seen the Champion traverse the country through nine regions, the Central Region being the tenth.

Mrs. Bisangwa acknowledged the contribution and support of the Development Partners, the MOH, the UAC, the Implementing Partners and the health sector stakeholders in the

success of these Campaigns. She pointed out that the Regional Campaigns have been running under the main theme of promoting male involvement in the EMTCT Response with the Central Region sub theme being: *Protecting babies; protecting our future.*

*"Mama Janet
thank you for
coming once
again!"*

*Once again thank
you for your
unwavering
commitment to
Uganda's babies
and the future of
our nation".*

She gave an overview of the Religious and Cultural Leaders Dialogue on EMTCT that was held on 26th August 2015, pointing out that this was a great opportunity to share information with key leaders that work with the public on a daily basis and to discuss the critical role they play in influencing communities to access health services. She urged all the stakeholders present to continue promoting EMTCT even after the launch, pointing out that because of the untiring efforts of the people of Uganda in all the other regions, the nation has earned international recognition for the great strides and outstanding achievements made regarding EMTCT, within the last two years.

Mrs. Bisangwa then called upon a representative of the Religious and Cultural Leaders to read a Statement of Commitment made during the Dialogue.

Statement of Commitment on EMTCT from Religious and Cultural Leaders

Statement of Commitment by the Religious and Cultural Leaders – Central Region

We the Religious and Cultural Leaders from the Central Region meeting at Zebra Hotel Masaka, on Wednesday 26th August 2015, acknowledge with gratitude the important role the First Lady of Uganda and National Champion EMTCT, has played in the HIV and EMTCT Response.

We commit to supporting this Campaign and to work with the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders to promote the EMTCT in the Central Region and hereby resolve to:

1. Share the information received in this Dialogue on EMTCT for Religious and Cultural Leaders with all stakeholders and our communities.
2. Champion behavioral change among our communities by "leading by example" and "role modeling" male involvement.
3. Integrate EMTCT Campaigns in our pastoral and cultural programmes.
4. Encourage male involvement by impressing upon our communities the financial and social implications of raising children infected and affected by HIV.

We are committed to a Generation Free of HIV and AIDS and to using our platforms and God given responsibilities, to make this happen. We applaud Mama Janet for her tireless efforts in promoting the well being of our people.

Discussion on Engaging Religious and Cultural Leaders in the EMTCT Response

The Director General of Services in the MOH, Dr. Jane Aceng expressed gratitude to the First Lady and National EMTCT Champion for her tireless efforts in sustaining the Campaign since the first Launch in 2013. She applauded the Development Partners, the Implementing Partners, the members of the National Organising and Local Organising Committees and the District Leaders of the Region for all the efforts that have culminated in a successful two months of the Campaign.

Dr. Jane Aceng then presented to the National EMTCT Champion the discussion points raised by different stakeholders in their groups while discussing: *“Best practices and strategies for engaging Religious and Cultural leaders in the HIV and EMTCT Response”*. Below are highlights of the presentation:



The DGHS Dr. Jane Ruth presenting the discussion points raised by different stakeholders

What are the existing best practices in engaging religious and cultural leaders in the HIV and EMTCT Response?

AMMMICALL

1. Municipal AIDS Committees have integrated the Religious and Cultural leaders representing them.
2. In the Central Region the EMTCT Campaigns of the Mayors have been aligned to the Buganda Health week activities.

3. Cultural Leaders have been engaged to embrace Safe Male Circumcision e.g. in the Rwenzuru Communities.

Uganda AIDS Commission

1. UAC has partnered with the Inter Religious Council to provide religious and cultural Pastoral letters for sensitisation of their congregations.
2. Simple messages on HIV have been developed in consultation with Religious and Cultural leaders and translated in 7 languages for dissemination.
3. Religious and cultural leaders are encouraged to promote the “*Abstinence and Be faithful*” strategy.
4. The *Kings Forum* and *Cultural Leaders Platforms* are used to mobilise communities to access HCT and Health services
5. Studies on cultural practices and norms have been documented to inform the HIV and EMTCT Response and used to develop messages for dissemination.
6. The UAC has worked with Cultural Leaders to make Pronouncements banning cultural practices that fuel HIV and AIDS for example banning child, widow inheritance and weeklong celebrations on dowry.
7. UAC has worked with the Buganda and Toro Kingdoms to integrate HIV in their activities e.g.
 - Buganda Kingdom has a Health Foundation which runs a health week that promotes HCT and other health practices
 - The King of Toro has Male involvement programmes and youth focused programmes



The DG UAC addressing the stakeholders

Lwengo District

- 2 Religious leaders are encouraged to work with women's groups and give them key messages to sensitise communities
- 3 The Religious and Cultural leaders are oriented on HIV prevention practices and the importance of mothers attending Antenatal Clinics.
- 4 Religious and Cultural Leaders participate in the District Quarterly HIV meetings where they are given feedback through reports

Religious Leaders

1. Key leaders in the Church have been championing the fight against HIV. This has been very effective.
2. Churches and Mosques promote HIV testing and counseling before marriage.
3. Cultural leaders have come up with laws for their subjects on preventing early marriage

Interventions by other stakeholders

1. Supporting the TBAs with economic empowerment activities so that they support women to attend ANC and deliver in Health Centers.
2. Establishing "Father Mother Baby Points" to promote, male involvement.
3. Mama Clubs have "Peer Men" who promote male involvement.

Proposals on practical ways in which Religious and Cultural Leaders in the HIV and EMTCT Response
--

1. Religious and cultural leaders should be involved in all HIV and AIDS campaigns and events.
2. Use the structures in places of worship and religious institutions such as schools to sensitise people on EMTCT
3. Engage religious based health institutions and NGOs in order to integrate HIV and EMTCT messages in their work.
4. The concept of "Ekisakate" should be used to disseminate information on HIV and AIDS to the younger generation.
5. Involve religious and cultural leaders in the activities of the District Health Teams.
6. Ensure partnerships between Religious and Cultural leaders and the communities at the fishing sites to promote sensitisation.

Other pertinent issues affecting the HIV and EMTCT Response discussed were:

1. ***Retention of Mothers in Care:*** There is a big challenge of retaining mothers in care. Some success has been registered where there have been programmes geared towards establishing Family Support Groups and Economic Support Groups. These have encouraged male participation and enabled mothers to remain in care through economic empowerment.
2. ***Economic empowerment of Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs):*** TBAs remain a contentious issue due to the challenge of inaccessible health facilities. Some districts recognize the contribution of the TBA and have partnered with them; providing economic empowerment to supplement their incomes and encouraging them to refer mothers for delivery at health facilities.
3. ***Promoting Male Involvement:*** Mama clubs promote peer learning amongst men who encourage male involvement in the health care of their spouses and families. It is recommended that emphasis be placed on Mother Baby- Father Points.
4. ***Religious and cultural Leaders participation in the Campaign:*** Religious and cultural leaders should be more intentional in sharing the message of HIV and EMTCT. Emphasis should be placed on couple testing and disclosure of results, as well as male involvement in the reproductive health of their spouses. There is need to monitor and evaluate the Religious and Cultural leaders contribution to their commitments during the various campaigns.
5. ***The “lost to follow up” issue:*** The “lost to follow up” issue is a matter of livelihoods and linkages between the community system and the health system. The health workers should make a concerted effort to reach mothers and their babies who return to homes and communities that are well known from the health facility records. Consequently there is a gap in the follow up system by health workers that creates the ‘lost’ issue and this should be addressed.

Presentation of a Report on the Status of EMTCT in the Central Region

The DHO Masaka Dr. Stuart Musisi presented the report of the Central Region. He gave a brief background to the Region which has a population of 9.6 million people; with an HIV prevalence of 10.6% that is higher than the national average of 7.3%.

He pointed out that apart from the general public, the Campaign also focused on the drivers of the epidemic in the Central Region that are: the Commercial hubs and highways, the water ways and the migratory populations from the cattle corridor. Other targeted adolescents, youth out of school and the motor cycle riders (boda boda).



The DHO Masaka presenting the status report to stakeholders

Some of the achievements mentioned were:

- 67% of the women who tested HIV positive were started on ART
- 79% of the babies that tested HIV positive were given Niverapine Syrup
- 67% of the people targeted tested as a couple
- 43% of the women targeted were provided with HCT services.
- 57% of the people tested were linked to care and treatment
- 51% ANC 1 attendance and a 39% ANC 4 attendance

Outreaches were organised targeting areas with known HIV and high risk populations hot spots namely commercial sex workers, fisher folk and truckers. The Region has also established Economic Strengthening Groups to support mother baby pair retention. 52 out of the 98 family support groups are active.

Dr. Musisi pointed out that there are a number of challenges impacting negatively on the EMTCT campaign namely: the low uptake of 2nd DNA PCR, disclosure, denial of the results and the stigma amongst clients.

Remarks by the UNAIDS Country Director

The UNAIDS Country Director challenged the people of the Central Region to take ownership and leadership of the HIV and AIDS response. He urged them to take the initiative to address the high prevalence rate and to take advantage of the peace and stability in the nation to end the epidemic.

He pointed out that if 90% of the people of Uganda tested for HIV the nation would have no less than 700,000 people in need of treatment. These people who have not bothered to take the HIV Test are the ones responsible for spreading the disease because they are currently unaware of their status. He expressed concern over the fact that the Traditional Healers are not targeted during the Campaigns and yet their beliefs and actions fuel the epidemic.



UNAIDS Country Rep Musa Bundungu making his remarks to stakeholders

He called upon the National EMTCT Champion to advocate for the Pope to address issues of HIV and AIDS when he meets the youth during his planned visit to Uganda in October 2015. He concluded his remarks by acknowledging all the stakeholders across the nation who have contributed to the decline in Mother to Child Transmission and thanked the National EMTCT Champion for her commitment to this cause.

Remarks by the US Ambassador to Uganda

The Representative of the US Ambassador to Uganda Mr. Erik Friedly pointed out that the US is proud to support EMTCT in Uganda, noting that Uganda has made a great deal of progress.

He however urged all the stakeholders present to be mindful of the challenges that still work to undermine the EMTCT Campaign nationwide and to work together to address these issues. He pointed out that US is committed to supporting MOH to ensure that Uganda, will see an AIDS Free Generation.

Remarks by the Hon Minister of Health

The Minister of Health Hon. Elioda Tumwesigye was represented by the Minister of State for Agriculture, Hon Sempijja. He appreciated the First Lady and National EMTCT Champion for her heart for the people of Masaka; recalling her efforts against the HIV and AIDS scourge in the late 80's and early 90's; working through the Uganda Women's Efforts to Save Orphans, Uganda Cares and The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO). He pointed out that there are serious policy issues regarding the HIV response that need to be addressed namely: the inadequate number of health facilities, the human resource concern in the health sector and the limited resources available for commodities.



Hon Sempijja addressing the stakeholders

He expressed concern over the fact that the Central Region has a HIV prevalence that is higher than the national prevalence rate and yet there lacks a spirited campaign to address the cultural norms and practices that are drivers of the disease. He noted the need to do whatever is possible in partnership with the Religious and Cultural Leaders to mobilise communities to ensure the utilisation of HCT and other health services. As the leader of the Buganda Caucus in Parliament, Hon. Sempijja made the commitment to mobilise the Caucus membership to identify effective strategies to address EMTCT in their constituencies; saying that: “As the leadership of the Central Region, we must work together in a concerted effort to bring down the high HIV prevalence amongst our people”.

“As the leadership of the Central Region, we must work together in a concerted effort to bring down the high HIV prevalence amongst our people”.

The Minister of State
for Agriculture

Remarks by the National EMTCT Champion

“I wish I was coming to Masaka to celebrate victory over HIV and AIDS. Considering the number of years we have been at this struggle it is heart breaking, listening to the statistics that are going up”.

Hon. Janet Kataha Museveni the National EMTCT Champion regretted the fact that so many years after the initial campaigns against HIV and AIDS two decades ago, the Central Region now faces a higher HIV prevalence than the national prevalence. She attributed this increase in the number of people infected to messages on condom use, which are run regardless of the fact that most of the young people in the Region cannot access condoms.

She observed that the influx of funds to support the HIV campaigns, the messages on condoms as a means of addressing HIV and the presence of drugs to contain the effects of the disease have now raised a population that disregards behavioral change as the most effective means of addressing the epidemic. These have undermined the progress Uganda was making in the 90's when messages on behavioral change had brought about drastic reduction in HIV and AIDS that earned Uganda international acclaim.

“With Option B plus Ugandans now have the opportunity to shut the flow of HIV from one generation to the other, by ensuring that babies are born free of HIV and AIDS. We must all join hands to make Option B plus work”

The National
Champion EMTCT



The EMTCT Champion making her remarks to stakeholders at the consultative meeting

She applauded the efforts of the Outgoing UNAIDS Country Director Mr. Bungudu who has been championing programmes for the mobilisation of communities and especially the youth through the Youth Forum. She urged the health workers to talk to those who come for health services and sensitise them about behavioral change. She urged parents and guardians to be an example to their children and to avoid reckless behavior such as spending time in bars and other social activities that fuel HIV and AIDS. “Each one of us will one day stand in the presence of God the creator and giver of life, to say what we have done with all that he has blessed us with, including what have we done to ensure that there is life; life in the glory of God”.

Hon. Janet Museveni concluded by saying that “With Option B plus Ugandans now have the opportunity to shut the flow of HIV from one generation to the other, by ensuring that babies are born free of HIV and AIDS. We must all join hands to make Option B plus work” she said.



The Public Rally

Remarks by the LC I Chairperson

The LC I Chairperson welcomed the gathering to the Launch of the 10th EMTCT Campaign stating that Masaka District was honored to host the event. She thanked the First Lady and National EMTCT Champion for her love for: the Central Region and for the well being of the people of Uganda.

Presentations on the HIV and EMTCT Response

The National EMTCT Champion was presented with testimonies from two families that used the Option B plus and gave birth to babies free from HIV and a blind lady sharing about the trials of discrimination and the stigma of living with HIV and AIDS. She was then presented with a Song by youth and children living with HIV and AIDS under programmes promoted by Mild May.

The last presentation was a message from the Women Living with HIV and AIDS by Ms. Margaret Namulondo. She drew the gatherings attention to the fact that there is need for an end to stigma and discrimination. Government must establish programmes that support mothers who are reluctant to take their drugs at home because of the fear of their husbands. She also expressed concern over the low male involvement in reproductive health of their wives which results in the fear of disclosure of results by the expectant mothers. She then advocated for the following issues:

- Improvement of the HCT services that are imposed on mothers and that do not measure up to the required standard.
- Inaccessible services which are long distances from the mothers who end up using the services of TBAs commonly referred to as HC 1.
- Accreditation of HC II as ART and EMTCT centers.
- Provision of SAACCOs for mothers to earn a living and access the centers.
- Provision of mother kits and condoms to be free for all.

Ms. Namulondo appealed to Government to keep consulting the women affected by HIV and AIDS when planning programmes for them and to identify a proper mechanism of tracing mothers lost to follow up. “There can be nothing for us, without us” she concluded.

Remarks by the Chairperson of the Towns and LCV Chairman Masaka District

The Chairperson of the Towns and Districts of Central Region and LC V Chairman Masaka District Mr. Kalungi, thanked the people of Central Region for attending the Rally in large numbers. He introduced the Regional and Local Organising Committee members and thanked them for their tireless efforts at making the Campaign a success.

He pointed out that the Stakeholders Consultative Meeting deliberated on the challenges faced in the Central Region and the fact that the Region has a high HIV prevalence rate. He reiterated the District Leaderships' commitment to fighting the scourge. He stated that the District Chairpersons are committed to working hard to ensure that services are provided at the Health facilities and that the ARTs are available for all those people who need them. "I appeal to all the people of Masaka and the whole of Central Region to go back and share messages on fighting HIV and AIDS" he said.

Remarks by the Pokino of Buddu Kabaka Representative

The Pokino of Buddu and representative of the Kabaka in the Region spoke about the activities that the cultural leaders had conducted during the Campaign. He said they had trained leaders and community members on EMTCT and sensitized their communities about the importance of accessing HCT and other health services. He thanked the Cultural leaders for heeding to the Government's call to support the Campaign and urged them to continue promoting the EMTCT response. He thanked the First Lady and National EMTCT Champion for the good work she has done in the Region over the years and assured her of His Highness the Kabaka of Buganda's support.

Remarks by the Director General Health Services MOH

The Director General Health Services in the Ministry of Health Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng congratulated the National EMTCT Champion and the gathering on implementing the 10th EMTCT Campaign and noted that all the Campaigns have been a resounding success. She shared the following statistics on HIV and AIDS:

- Adults in Uganda with HIV now stand at 7.3%, with the HIV prevalence in women at 8.3% and men at 6.1%
- 4% of young adults of the age 15-24 are living with HIV.
- In the Central 1 Region the HIV prevalence is 10.6%, while in the Central 2 districts it is 9.0 percent

"Some health facilities such as the Mbuya Reach Out programme in Kampala have had no cases of peri-natal HIV transmission in the last 3 years".

The Director
General Health
Services

She explained that the EMTCT programme is multi pronged and includes interventions for primary prevention of HIV infection among women of child bearing age, providing the unmet need for family planning among HIV infected women, lifelong ART among HIV infected men, children, pregnant and lactating women as well as family centered care for mothers, men and children.

Dr. Aceng said “Some health facilities such as the Mbuya Reach Out programme in Kampala have had no cases of peri-natal HIV transmission in the last 3 years. Similarly the peri-natal HIV transmission rates in the National Referral Hospital which provides services to a third of the pregnant women living with HIV are now between 3% and 4% down from 30% in 2000.

She however noted that there are still a number of challenges affecting this progress, some of which are:

- Inadequate coverage of services due to inadequate human resource and limited health infrastructure, especially at the lower level health facilities.
- Poor health seeking behavior; only 47% of mothers attend all 4 ANC visits.
- Loss to follow up of women and babies who do not return for their appointments and drug refills, resulting in retention and adherence challenges.

She expressed the Government’s gratitude for the continued support of all the health sector development and implementing partners and thanked the National EMTCT Champion for staying the course and for her leadership in the EMTCT Response.

Remarks by the Chairperson of AIDS Development Partners

The Chairperson of the AIDS Development Partners, Dr. Flora Banage commended Uganda on the great strides made that have resulted in being identified by the UNAIDS Global Plan as one of the countries identified with the potential to achieve EMTCT. She noted that this potential is real since progress has been made in reducing the HIV transmission rates from 9.5% in 2012 to 5.3% to date.

Dr. Banage observed that there are however still a number of challenges that need to be addressed to make this milestone a reality namely: prioritising ending new infections in women and girls, addressing gender barriers affecting access to health services, ensuring male involvement, supporting more women to attend at least four ANCs, identifying HIV positive mothers and their babies early and ensuring that health workers are adequate and have the supplies and skills to attend to the women. She also recognised the need to work closely with the Religious and Cultural Leaders in the HIV Response.

“The AIDS Development Partners support the efforts of the National EMTCT Champion and we will continue to commit ourselves to working closely with MOH, policy makers, the CSOs and the general population, as we protect our babies and our future” she said.

Remarks by the US Ambassador

Mr. Erik Friedly spoke on behalf of the US Ambassador to Uganda. He extended the US Government's sincere appreciation to the First Lady for her commendable leadership on in the HIV and EMTCT Response. He noted that there has been an impressive decline in HIV transmission amongst infants from an estimated 31% in 2009 to an estimated 5% in 2014. Furthermore, service coverage has increased from 25% in 2009 to 94% in 2014.

He commended the MOH for extending these health services and improving the quality of care and the provision ART. "Mother- baby care points now provide a "one stop shop" so that health care providers can see and attend to mothers living with HIV and their exposed infants together. There is also greater accessibility to family planning by women living with HIV" he said. He however noted that there are still a number of gaps hindering the achievement of Uganda's EMTCT goals namely:

"We have accomplished much and we have come a long way together on this path to an AIDS free generation, but much work still remains.

I am confident however that together we will achieve all we have set out to achieve"

US Ambassador

- Retention of mothers and infants through the end of the breast feeding period.
- Ensuring male involvement which is a critical component of getting and retaining women in care.
- The testing of HIV exposed infants that still occurs later than is recommended.

The United States Government through the Presidents Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is committed to continuing collaborative and intensive efforts toward EMTCT goals. "We have accomplished much and we

have come a long way together on this path to an AIDS free generation but much work still remains. I am confident however that together we will achieve all we have set out to achieve" he said.



The US Ambassador Rep Making remarks at the public rally

Remarks by Country Representative UNICEF

In her remarks the Country Representative UNICEF Ms. Aida Girma, gave recognition to the efforts of the National EMTCT Champion that have realized yet another successful EMTCT Campaign launch. She observed that as a result of these efforts Uganda is one of the six African nations that has achieved the UNAIDS Global Milestone, one year ahead of schedule.

She urged the MOH and other stakeholders to fast track the realization of the National AIDS Trust Fund that will help to close the existing funding gap and to promote sustainability of the HIV and AIDS response in Uganda. She drew attention to the fact that while everyone works towards promoting an HIV Free generation, Ugandans should be reminded that there are still a large number of children living with HIV; two thirds of whom cannot access the necessary treatment. “The UN calls upon all stakeholders to ensure the complete availability of drugs for children” she said.



She noted that there is global evidence that the scourge is shifting to the adolescents and is higher amongst the adolescent girls and women. She thanked the First Lady for accepting to champion the cause of adolescents at risk of HIV and other health problems, noting that it is imperative that no one is left behind in the effort to support those affected and infected by the disease. She assured the Champion of the UN family's support to the Government.

Remarks by the District Woman MP Masaka

The District Woman MP Masaka, Hon. Mubanda welcomed the First Lady and National EMTCT Champion to Masaka District, with a promise that the leadership of the District is determined to ensure a change in the HIV prevalence in the Region. She thanked the Champion for doing her part in alerting the nation about the epidemic and the new channels through which children can be freed from a life of HIV and AIDS.

She appealed to the people of the Region to take heed to the call to protect themselves and their children. She urged all the stakeholders present to work hand in hand to fulfill the EMTCT goal of an HIV free generation. She called for strategies to ensure that: the low coverage of ANC is addressed, the TBAs are mobilised to refer mothers to health facilities early in their term of pregnancy and that HIV positive mothers are encouraged to take their drugs by addressing issues of societal stigma.



Hon. Mubanda observed that there are still a lot of harmful cultural practices that promote the transmission of HIV such as widow inheritance and early marriages that, the Cultural and Religious leaders must help to address. She thanked the Development Partners, the UN family and the US Government for supporting the HIV response. She applauded the people of the Region for participating in the EMTCT Campaign and urged them to continue this effort, well after the main campaign activities are concluded.

Remarks by the National EMTCT Champion

“Today I want to thank those of you who heard of this message of protecting families against HIV and AIDS in the late 80s and decided to change your behavior at that time. I want to thank you and appreciate you”.

The First Lady and National EMTCT Champion further applauded the people of the Central Region for heeding to the call of the EMTCT Campaign by taking part in accessing services and for their attendance at the Rally. She made reference to the escalating HIV prevalence in the Region and lamented the fact that while the major focus of the HIV and AIDS campaign in the late 80’s, began in the Central Region, statistics indicate that the Region is still faced with the burden of the disease.

She urged the people of the Region to address the burden of HIV and AIDS in the general population, even as they advocate for EMTCT amongst mothers and babies. She paid tribute to those who have made it their duty to educate their communities on how to protect themselves and young people from contracting HIV and AIDS. She also thanked those who are HIV positive and have chosen to work with the MOH to share their experiences in order to help others. She commended them for their heart of service to the children of the next generation.

“Men get involved in the reproductive health of your family; that is the gift you can give them. Do not let your wife to be alone in the long process of child birth. This is a war that we must win as a country and you must win as a family”.

The National
Champion EMTCT



She drew attention to the fact that the A B C strategy still works and this should be emphasized to all communities. She expressed gratitude to God for the gift of Option B plus and urged couples to go for testing in order to protect their babies in the event that they are found to be carrying the virus. This will ensure that no baby in Uganda is born with HIV and AIDS anymore.

The National EMTCT Champion encouraged families to find out about Family Planning in order to space their children, pointing out that husbands should attend antenatal clinics at least every four months with their spouses and ensure that they deliver at a health facility, where the new born baby will be tested to know its health status.

“Men get involved in the reproductive health of your family; that is the gift you can give them. Do not let your wife to be alone in the long process of child birth. This is a war that we must win as a country and you must win as a family”.

Handover of the Masaka District Ambulance and Mobile Clinic.

At the close of the EMTCT Campaign Launch, in a colorful ceremony amidst ululations, the National EMTCT Champion handed over an Ambulance and Mobile Clinic to the DHO Dr. Stuart Musisi and the District Councilor Hon. Mudasi.

The Ambulance and Mobile Clinic was donated to the People of Masaka by the District Woman MP Hon. Mubanda.

4.0 Conclusion

The Central Region EMTCT Campaign was the largest of the 10 campaigns held country wide, having covered 21 Districts. The Campaign once again enabled the Leadership of these districts to hear messages on EMTCT and HIV and AIDs and to mobilize their communities to actively participate in accessing various health services.

The Region witnessed a great partnership and effort in the scaling up of services and the availability of commodities in support of the EMTCT Response in the Region. A key highlight of the Campaign was the Dialogue on EMTCT for Religious and Cultural Leaders that provided opportunity for the dissemination of technical information on the Status of HIV in the Region and a discussion on practical approaches by the Religious and Cultural Leaders to build partnerships with other stakeholders in the health sector and to mobilise and engage their communities.

Pictorial







