

ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN FOR ELIMINATION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD-TRANSMISSION (EMTCT)



NATIONAL LAUNCH REPORT

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Acknowledgements

- Ministry of Health and UAC for technical support and partnerships
- UNAIDS, UNICEF & OAFLA head office for the financial support
- Star Southwest (EGPAF) for financial and logistical support
- UHMG for partnership in designing and delivery of the eMTCT Champion's IEC materials.
- Ntungamo District and various community agencies for ably participating in the preparation of and the actual launch.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Table of Contents	3
INTRODUCTION:.....	4
eMTCT CAMPAIGN IN WESTERN UGANDA:	4
a) HIGH LEVEL CONSULTATIVE MEETING AT IRENGA:.....	5
OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:.....	6
PUBLIC CAMPAIGN AT ITOJO HOSPITAL GROUNDS:.....	6
a) SYMBOLIC LAUNCH OF OPTION B+:.....	8
GUEST SPEECHES:	8
a) MEDIA ACTIVITIES THAT WERE UNDERTAKEN INCLUDED:	11
NEXT STEPS:.....	12
Conclusion	13
Appendices:	14

INTRODUCTION:

The First Lady of Uganda, as a Champion for eMTCT, has a 4 year (2012 – 2015) strategic plan for eMTCT advocacy campaign). She is carrying out national workshops, regional campaigns, field visit to various related projects throughout Uganda and she is holding related advocacy and networking meetings.

The goal of the campaigns is to contribute towards eMTCT in line with the national framework and OAFLA mandate. Her strategy is mobilisation and engagement with all technical and political leadership, stakeholders, local communities and development agencies for effective team work towards this common goal. Her role is to act as a catalyst for efficient service delivery and utilisation. This will ensure no more HIV +ve babies, alive and health mothers. Her dream is an HIV free generation and an HIV Africa.

eMTCT CAMPAIGN IN WESTERN UGANDA:

On 22nd March, 2013, the first Lady carried out week-long eMTCT campaigns through the media and field visits organized and sponsored by various stakeholders in collaboration with the OAFLA UGANDA secretariat. This culminated in a three-tier event: A consultative meeting with eMTCT stakeholders at a high level technical briefing, a public rally and the symbolic launch of the Option B+ strategy.



a) HIGH LEVEL CONSULTATIVE MEETING AT IRENGA:

At this meeting, representatives from the Ministry of Health, Uganda AIDS Commission, UNAIDS, US Government team, regional projects such as STAR-SW, UHMG, representatives from civil society, local governments and the private sector shared progress and plans for eMTCT since Serena Stakeholders meeting in August 2012. This meeting was hosted at her home in Irenga. The Champion appreciated the work the IPs and ADPs are doing in Uganda. She reminded them that the country has moved in the response because of the concerted efforts all stakeholders. She reminded the stakeholders about Uganda's historical achievements in the past. She said in the past Uganda achieved extra ordinary results in a cost effective way because the approach was simple yet effective. The messages were clear and based on our cultural values. The leadership repeatedly mentioned the national policy of ABC - Abstinence for young people, Being Faithful for the married and Condom use for vulnerable groups. This approach catapulted Uganda to the global scene because of the ability to reduce HIV prevalence from about 18% to 6% in a period of about 5 years. She called for close collaboration and team work in the struggle against the scourge.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Several key stakeholders and Implementing partners were fully represented, demonstrating general good will and how partnerships can make eMTCT successful. (see appendix iv for the list of IPs who attended)
- There was an emphasis on partnership and cooperation so as to combat the scourge
- It was pointed out that there is a need for a committee to vet and streamline messages going to the public.
- Though some progress has been made generally, there is need for accelerated efforts toward eMTCT and accountability.
- Commitments were made in terms of support to the champion, partnerships to be developed and leaderships to be involved.
- There was a call for increases human resources in health and an appropriate HR policy framework.

PUBLIC CAMPAIGN AT ITOJO HOSPITAL GROUNDS:

After the high level meeting, the Champion proceeded to Itojo grounds, which saw more than 3,000 people gather. In-company of the Hon Minister of Health, Chairman Uganda AIDS Commission, a representative of the Excellency US ambassador in Uganda and other dignitaries, she inspected 10 stalls that displayed eMTCT related information materials and demonstration services. In her motivational and admonition remarks, she asked whether these services were actually on the ground, servicing community people. She called for improved efforts and cautioned about careless and wrong messaging that could be fatal to the people of Uganda.



In her public address, she spoke heartily about the need for disciplined behavior for everybody. She urged Ugandans to re-dedicate themselves to the fight against HIV/AIDS like other countries have done instead of watching helplessly as the infection rates continue to rise. She said there is need for discipline and self-control starting with the youth abstaining from premarital sex, mutual faithfulness among married couples while those women who are already infected should use Option B+ to protect their babies from being infected. She called for male involvement and criticized men who have disappointed their wives and said that husbands should take up their God-given responsibilities as heads of families if society is to thrive. She said there is need to come with home-growth, culture-appropriate messages for the masses. She also counseled all stakeholders on the need for intensive sensitization, calling upon leaders at all levels to take responsibility and get involved accordingly. She called on the masses to access these services which are now available near them. *(Refer to the full speech in annex).*

a) SYMBOLIC LAUNCH OF OPTION B+:



The eMTCT Champion proceeded to the tent where a number of couple waited for her to come and symbolically launch the Option B+ strategy. The champion the administered the appropriate ART tablet to an HIV-positive couple and encouraged them to observe strict adherence.

GUEST SPEECHES:

Earlier on, there were several welcome, appreciation and admonition speeches by the Chairman LC5 Ntungamo district and the Chairman ADPs.

- The Chairman UAC, after appreciating the Champion, emphasized that the majority of Ugandans are still HIV negative and need to remain that way through behavioral change: abstinence and being faithful. He also encouraged HIV positive couples to go for Option B+ whenever they are expecting since we are all gearing towards an HIV free generation.

- There was testimony from an HIV negative couple, which emphasized faithfulness in their marriage.
- The representative of the US Ambassador to Uganda, Ms. Karen Klimowski said Option B+ has been successful in many countries and pledged the US support to achieve eMTCT targets in Uganda. She said that the US Government is committed to working together with the Government of Uganda to achieve the goal of an AIDS-free generation. She informed the gathering that this financial year alone, the American people have invested 40 million dollars to accelerate eMTCT services in Uganda. She asked the government to address maternal and child health strengthen supplies and scale up health centers through effective HR policies and strategies, increasing M&E at grass root level and addressing gender imbalances at community level while encouraging male involvement in eMTCT. She thanked Mrs. Museveni for the vision, dedication and spirit to take on this challenge. *(See appendix iii for full speech).*



- The woman Member of Parliament, Mitooma district appreciative the efforts of the Champion in fighting the scourge in the country. She said that MPs were also supportive of eMTCT and had a team sent to Harare Zimbabwe with some MOH officials for a study tour in relation to HIV and lobbying for funds to better health care. She requested the MOH to help attract more skilled doctors to the health centers since many are high performing areas. There was a big emphasis on men to support their wives/spouses during pregnancy.

- The Minister of State for Primary Health Care, Hon. Sarah Opendi in her speech observed that the burden of the HIV epidemic in the country is still enormous with the transmission from Mother-to-Child as the second most common mode of transmission. She said that in order to achieve elimination of HIV in children, there is need to embrace all the prongs of prevention of Mother-to-Child transmission which include HIV prevention in young women, avoiding unwanted pregnancies among HIV-positive women and the provision of ARVs to HIV-positive pregnant women to prevent transmission to the baby. She informed the Guest of Honour that there is a multi-drug resistant TB virus and much effort needs to be invested in fighting the spread of TB because there is a strong correlation between TB and HIV. 50-70% of TB cases have HIV. TB costs 10 million for treatment and treating it unsustainable yet it is preventable like HIV. She recommended integrating TB sensitization into HIV related cases. She said having an HIV free generation is possible when there is partnership. The Minister expressed appreciation to Hon. Janet Museveni, the Ministry of Health, all implementing partners, AIDS development partners and the US governments for financial and technical support extended to the HIV response in the country and for their support in organizing the launch (*see appendix ii for full speech*).



a) MEDIA ACTIVITIES THAT WERE UNDERTAKEN INCLUDED:

There were also week-long messages meant to make a call to communities to go for testing and access health related information as follows:

- ☐ Radio spots, DJ mentions and announcements on selected radio stations.
- ☐ Radio talk-shows were ran in western radios and in Kampala.
- ☐ Banners for mobilization were produced and placed in strategic positions both in Kampala, and along the highway to Ntungamo.
- ☐ TV spots: The 1st Lady's launch statement was recorded and run on selected TVs and radios.
- ☐ There was a news supplement in the paper media. (*see the table of the media plan*)

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS:

There was a general feeling that:

- The first lady's championship is already acting as an effective catalyst for accelerated action. There is an observation that since the August 2012 stakeholders' consultative meeting, her visit to a successful community-based eMTCT her, her speech on Women's Day 2013 and her various related meetings, there had been accelerated activities in the eMTCT sphere. (Refer to progress report).
- There is need for enhanced leadership involvement at all levels in sensitizing masses on matters relating to HIV and eMTCT
- There was emphasis on male involvement by standing out, getting involved and protecting their families
- Though some progress has been made generally, there is need for accelerated efforts toward eMTCT and accountability by service providers.
- Due to increased media campaigns prior to the actual launch, there was increased eMTCT service up-take at the various health centers (*refer to Kitwe Health Center for a brief report*) and increased conversations around HIV by media houses and on the streets.
- There is need for equal attention to the primary prevention prong of the 4 prongs of eMTCT response

NEXT STEPS:

- An immediate set up of an HIV/AIDS messages clearing committee by UAC
- Increased sensitization of the leadership at all levels on the need to speak out more on HIV in general and eMTCT in particular.
- Documenting standard messages for stake holders by UAC and MOH

- Increased sensitization of communities on the need to maximize eMTCT services
- Lobbying and advocating for appropriate policies on Human Resources.

In her various messages in different meetings in the region, the champion highlights that she would like to see the following:

- Renewed commitment by all leaders at all levels to promote the eMTCT cause at every opportunity.
- Standardized right and appropriate messages;
- A holistic multi-pronged approach to the response;
- Complementarity and no duplication in activities aimed at same goal;
- Active grass root involvement;
- Home growth solutions;
- Improved efficiency & accountability in service delivery.
- Ultimately an AIDS free generation and Africa.

Conclusion

The launch was very successful considering the attendance of over 3,000 community members, the effective participation of implementing partners, the feedback received and extensive media coverage. The missing link has been largely leadership involvement and now there is hope for eMTCT. Going forward, the National Champion, Hon. Janet Museveni through OAFLA Uganda Secretariat, will continue to work with all partners to engage stakeholders, leaders and communities in the whole country in order to achieve the eMTCT targets for Uganda by 2015.

Appendices:

- i. Statement by Hon. Janet K. Museveni at the EMTCT Implementing Partners' meeting held at Irenga on 22nd March 2013
- ii. Speech by the Minister of State for Health, Primary Health Care, Hon. Sarah Opendi at the launch of EMTCT at Itojo Hospital ground
- iii. Speech by H.E. the Representative of the US Ambassador to Uganda, Ms. Karen Klimowski
- iv. List of Implementing Partners that participated at the campaign
- v. Media Plan and IEC materials.