

Report on the Campaign of the Elimination of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV/AIDS (EMTCT)



MID - WESTERN REGION (HOIMA)

23rd March 2015

(DRAFT)

Table of Contents

Acronyms.....	3
1.0 Background	4
1.1 Objectives of the Consultative Meeting	5
1.2 Participants Profile	5
1.3 Campaign activities.....	5
1.4 Outcomes of the Consultative Meeting	8
Deliberations of the Consultative Meeting.....	8
2.0 Remarks by the Executive Director OAFLA	8
2.1 Presentation on the Overview of EMTCT in the Region	9
2.2 Presentation of the discussion on hindrances to couple testing in the Region.....	11
3.0 Remarks by Dignitaries in attendance at the Consultative Meeting.....	12
3.1 Remarks by the Minister of Health.....	15
3.2 Remarks by the First Lady and EMTCT Champion	16
4.0 The Public Rally held at Booma Grounds	18
Conclusion	27
Pictorial.....	29

Acronyms

ADPs	AIDS Development Partners
AMICAALL	Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV and AIDS
ANC	Antenatal Clinics
ARV	Anti Retroviral
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
DHO	District Health Officer
EMTCT	Elimination of Mother To Child Transmission
HCT	HIV Counseling and Testing
MOH	Ministry of Health
MSM	Men having sex with men
MTCT	Mother To Child Transmission
OAFLA	Organisation of African First Ladies Against HIV/AIDS
PLHIV	People Living With HIV and AIDS
SMS	Safe Male Circumcision
UAC	Uganda AIDS Commission
UPMB	Uganda Protestant Medical Bureau
VHTs	Village Health Teams

1.0 Background

The Organisation of African First Ladies Against AIDS (OAFLA) is committed to contributing to efforts towards an AIDS free Africa.

OAFLA (U) has developed a four year strategy to achieve the virtual EMTCT by 2015, under the following vision and mission:

Vision: the virtual EMTCT by 2015; towards an HIV Free Generation.

Mission: to advocate for effective strategies, shared responsibility and accountability for community mobilisation and efficient EMTCT service delivery.

In fulfillment of her Mission OAFLA (U) in partnership with the Uganda AIDS Commission (UAC), the Ministry of Health (MOH), Development Partners, Implementing Partners and other Stakeholders has launched 7 EMTCT Regional Campaigns nationwide since March 2013, as follows:

1. South Western Region – Ntungamo District 22nd March 2013
2. Northern Region – Lira District 28th June 2013
3. Eastern Region – Tororo District 16th August 2013
4. Karamoja Region – Napak District 16th September 2013
5. Kampala Region – Kampala 2nd March 2014
6. West Nile Region – Arua District 13th June 2014
7. Busoga Region – Jinja District 4th December 2014

This is a Report of the 8th EMTCT Campaign covering 14 districts in the Mid – Western Region. The Campaign was launched in Hoima District on 23rd March 2015 under the Regional theme “Test together, Know Together, Disclose Together”. This theme is within the context of the greater EMTCT Regional Campaign theme: *“Stand Out, Participate and Be Counted! Have an HIV Free Baby”*.

The EMTCT Campaigns are geared towards creating awareness about the need for male involvement in the reproductive health of their spouses. The Campaigns which have received wide acclaim because of their relative successes have been instrumental in increasing demand for commodities and services. They have also brought together national stakeholders in consultative meetings, organized to share perspectives on the HIV Response in each region.

1.1 Objectives of the Consultative Meeting

The objectives of the Consultative Meeting in Hoima were to:

- Provide a Forum for key stakeholders in the EMTCT Response to share information regarding EMTCT and HIV/AIDS in general.
- Hold conversations on promoting the Campaign theme: Test together, Know together and Disclose together and share recommendations.

1.2 Participants Profile

The Consultative Meeting was attended by Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament, a representative of the US Ambassador to Uganda, the UNAIDS Director Global Plan and Global Fund, Implementing and Development Partners, as well as officials from the UAC and the MOH. Also in attendance were key stakeholders from the 14 Districts of the Mid-Western Region including: political leaders, key national and regional actors in the health sector, the district leadership, members of civil society organisations as well as representatives of: the Village Health Teams (VHTs) People Living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV) and cultural and religious leaders.

1.3 Campaign activities

OAFLA (U) together with the MOH organised a number of activities in addition to the Consultative Meeting, as pre-cursors to the Campaign some of these were:

- **Visit to the Omukama of Bunyoro:** OAFLA (U), Ministry of Health and the Infectious Diseases Institute officials visited His Highness the Omukama of Bunyoro on 24th February 2015, to brief him about the upcoming Campaign.



The king of Bunyoro posing a picture with the team after a dialogue with him.

They also solicited his support in mobilising his subjects to access services and participate in the Campaign activities.

- **Dialogue with Religious Leaders:** A Dialogue on Engaging Religious Leaders in the HIV/EMTCT Response was conducted on 20th March 2015, as a pre-cursor to the Campaign. The Dialogue which was attended by 120 Religious Leaders discussed the critical role religious leaders' play in mobilizing communities in the HIV and AIDS and EMTCT Response. Deliberations brought out the current realities that Religious Leaders face with regard to the poor level of male involvement in reproductive health of their spouses, as well as homosexuality and prostitution in the Region. The participants were also presented with the findings of the *Survey on Condom Use for HIV Prevention among Christian HIV Sero-Discordant and HIV Sero-Positive Concordant Married Couples in Uganda* conducted by Uganda Christian Action Network. The findings sparked off a debate on the need for religious leaders to address the current realities of the increasing extra marital relationships in the Church and the reluctance of their communities to follow through with the prevention prong on Abstinence, Faithfulness and Condom use.



Religious leaders after the workshop

The Dialogue was highly participatory and concluded with a Statement of Commitment to participation in the HIV and AIDS and EMTCT Response, made by all the Religious Leaders both from the Muslim and Christian faiths.

- **Visit to Azur Health Center IV by the EMTCT Champion:** One of the highlights of the 8th Campaign, was the Champion's visit on the morning of the 23rd of March 2015, to Azur Christian Health Center IV in Hoima town. While at the Health Center she commissioned an Ultra Sound Scan Machine, visited expectant mothers admitted in the Maternity ward and witnessed couples attending antenatal clinic at the Health Center.



The EMTCT Champion at Azur Health Centre

Azur Christian Health Center IV was founded by the Bunyoro Kitara Diocese under the Uganda Protestant Medical Bureau (UPMB) with initial funding from Christians from a community in Azur in the United States of America.

The Health Center is currently implementing a five year project named: *National Expansion and Strengthening of sustainable HIV/TB Services in Uganda*, with funding from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

1.4 Outcomes of the Consultative Meeting

The Consultative Meeting drew the attention of key stakeholders to the challenges of implementing couple testing in the Region. The participants were presented with a Status Report on EMTCT in the Region and the progress made in the two month campaign period. The Report stated that during this period the Region saw a rise in the number of communities reached with messages on HIV and EMTCT, access to service delivery and the mothers that attended the ANC.

The Meeting discussed issues hindering the realization of couple testing and identified means to address these hindrances, so as to ensure couples utilize HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) and that access to health care services by men improves. Some of the proposals made to address these hindrances were: sensitisation to counteract issues of stigma and cultural beliefs that hinder the utilization of HCT and ANC, promoting different health packages to attract male attendance at the ANC, improving the supply chain and logistics management, promoting adolescent friendly health services and promoting the economic empowerment of women to address the gender dynamics that impact on their access to reproductive health services.

Deliberations of the Consultative Meeting

2.0 Remarks by the Executive Director OAFLA

The Executive Director OAFLA (U), Mrs. Beat Bisangwa welcomed all the stakeholders to the Mid-Western Region Consultative Meeting. She thanked the First Lady for championing the cause, pointing out that this was the 8th Regional Campaign covering the districts of Kiboga, Kyankwanzi, Hoima, Masindi, Buliisa, Kiryandongo, Kibaale, Kasese, Kabarole, Kyegegwa, Kyenjojo, Kamwenge, Bundibugyo and Ntoroko.

She gave a brief account of the pre- campaign meetings pointing out that a lot of work had gone into mobilising communities to access health services, scaling up service delivery and the stocking of commodities.

Mrs. Bisangwa gave a brief overview of the deliberations held in the Dialogue with Religious Leaders in which she said a number of concerns were raised regarding issues of stigma, limiting cultural beliefs and the low levels of uptake of family planning amongst women living with HIV and AIDS.



Executive Director OAFLA UG Mrs Bisangwa making her remarks

She thanked all the stakeholders who participated in the pre-event meetings and activities including the UN family, the Development partners, Implementing Partners and the MOH; calling upon them to continue intensifying strategies to promote EMTCT in the Region.

2.1 Presentation on the Overview of EMTCT in the Region

The DHO Hoima Dr. Ruyonga presented the Mid – Western Region Status Report on EMTCT, covering the period January to February 2015. He gave a brief background of the Region which he said covers 14 districts and has 13 hospitals and 593 health facilities, 24 of which are at the level of Health Center IV. He explained that the HIV prevalence in the region is 8.2% higher than the average national prevalence of 7.2%.

The Campaign set a target to increase EMTCT performance by 10% in all areas of the PMTCT cascade, where achievements are below 95%. The data gathered in the months of January and February 2015 was compared against the baseline data of December 2014. Option B plus is currently being rolled out up to HC III and in a few Health Center IIs that are in hard to reach areas.

During the Campaign period, there was effective mobilization that resulted in an increase in the number of mothers attending ANC. This resulted in a yield of HIV positive mothers increasing by 43%. There was also a 9% increase of mothers initiated on ART and the number of babies undergoing DNA and PCR testing increased by 42%. However there was a high drop out of 28% of the clients handled. Many clients do not deliver from the facilities. For those who deliver at the facility the MTCT prevalence was 6% which is high. The number of women who attended their first ANC during the Campaign period increased by 43%, while the number counseled and tested increased by 28%.



The DHO Hoima Dr. Joseph Ruyonga presenting the status report to the stakeholders.

The Campaign was characterized by outreaches targeting areas with a known HIV prevalence and high population including the Kyangwali Refugee Camp. Safe Male Circumcision was conducted in these communities and outreaches held for key targeted populations such as the MSMs, fisher folk and sex workers. Following the HCT component of the campaign, the positivity rate was 1.7% in the general population and 4.3% for MARPS.

Dr. Ruyonga highlighted the challenges faced in the region namely: the DRC cross boarder movements by mothers who seek health services in Uganda; which makes follow up challenging.

The limited availability of long term family planning methods at lower health facilities, lack of mechanisms to support follow up of HIV positive clients in the communities for adherence and the district leaderships' challenge in tracking progress of the services being provided in outreaches due to the unavailability of daily updates.

He thanked the partners who have worked closely with the districts in the Region to support the EMTCT response and the First Lady for her work as EMTCT Champion.

2.2 Presentation of the discussion on hindrances to couple testing in the Region

The Minister of State for Family Health Care, Hon. Sarah Opendi shared feedback from the Meeting's discussion on hindrances to the realization of couple testing and proposals to address them.

Some of the major issues hindering couple testing were said to be: the “blame game” amongst couples over “who infected who”, the fear of knowing ones results and the ensuing stigma from family and community members, poverty and inferiority complex that results in women being unable to make decisions regarding their reproductive health, lack of trust and the high level of infidelity amongst couples, as well as the male ego and attitudes resulting from gender stereo- typing.



Hon. Minister Sarah Opendi- MOH presenting the issues raised during the consultative meeting

Some of the proposals made to address these hindrances were: sensitisation to counteract issues of stigma and cultural beliefs that hinder the utilization of HCT and ANC, promoting different health packages to attract male attendance at the ANC, improving the supply chain and logistics management, promoting adolescent friendly health services and supporting the economic empowerment of women to address the gender dynamics that negatively impact the utilization of reproductive health services.

She expressed the MOH's gratitude to the EMTCT Champion for her commitment to the people of Uganda and the babies of the next generation in particular, pointing out that the successes registered in the last 7 campaigns are a result of her hard work and dedication. She also thanked all the partners for their contribution to the progress made

3.0 Remarks by Dignitaries in attendance at the Consultative Meeting

3.1 Remarks by the UNAIDS Country Director

The UNAIDS Country Director, Mr. Musa Bungudu expressed gratitude to the UN Family, the Development partners and Implementing partners for their sustained commitment, since the EMTCT Campaigns began two years ago.

He thanked the MOH and UAC for their exemplary work in addressing issues of HIV and AIDS, stating that their work is highly respected in the African region and globally. He however urged them to pay urgent attention to the need to strengthen the Health Center II's which comprise 63% of the all the health facilities in the Region and which attend to the bulk of the population.

"The spread of the Virus is on-going; please go beyond talking and onto action. As the UN we affirm our commitment to walking this journey with you"

*Musa Bungudu
UNAIDS Country
Director*

He drew the meetings attention to the information shared about the critical role that religious and cultural leaders play in reaching communities with messages on EMTCT, stating that they are key stakeholders that should be supported to play their role effectively. He urged the Meeting to desist from blaming the high HIV prevalence rate on the recent oil production activities, saying that Nigeria, one of the largest oil producers in the Region was not witnessing similar challenges. He urged the health sector to use places of worship as regular HCT sites.



UNAIDS Country Director Musa Bundungu making his remarks to the stakeholders

“The spread of the Virus is on-going; please go beyond talking and onto action. As the UN we affirm our commitment to walking this journey with you” he concluded.

3.2 Remarks by the representative of the US Ambassador to Uganda

Ms. Lisa Godwin represented the US Ambassador to Uganda. She appreciated the Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV and AIDS (AMICAALL) over their commitment and dedication to the HIV Response, witnessed in the statements communicated at the Mayors dinner. She explained that 30 Mayors and Town Clerks convened in a pre- launch dinner on the eve of the Stakeholders Consultative Meeting in Hoima. “The difference these leaders are making for their communities inspires us” she said



Lisa Godwin addressing the stakeholders

She thanked the DHO Hoima and all the regional actors for conducting a successful campaign geared towards addressing the issues affecting the EMTCT Response in the Region. Ms. Godwin observed that: “No single group, donor, district leader, MP or Minister nor CBO, nor peer educator nor First Lady can fight HIV and AIDS alone; we must work together”. She urged all the stakeholders to pull resources together to take on the challenge of ensuring that no baby is born with the HIV again.

“No single group, donor, district leader, MP nor Minister, nor CBO, nor peer educator, nor First Lady can fight HIV and AIDS alone; we must work together”.

*Ms. Lisa Godwin
representing the US
Ambassador to Uganda*

She thanked the Champion for her efforts saying: “Your leadership has gathered all of us together, but only by combining our efforts can we make the strides. Together we can”.

3.3 Remarks by the Director General Uganda AIDS Commission

The Director General UAC Dr. Christine Ondo, pledged to continue working with the First Lady, the MOH and all stakeholders towards an HIV free generation. She talked about a number of strategic documents that the UAC has developed to guide the national efforts on HIV and AIDS including: the National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan and the National Prevention Action Plan (NPAP), which she urged all partners to use in their work.



DG UAC Dr.Christine Ondo making her remarks

Dr. Ondo also talked of the National AIDS Information Documentation Center which will provide documentation on HIV.

Lastly the Message Clearing House that is led by the UAC and that assesses all the messages on HIV and AIDS, to ensure that they are appropriate and beneficial before they go out to the society. The Commission has also partnered with the self coordinating entities for research, science and academia in order to share research findings that could be harnessed to inform the Response.

3.1 Remarks by the Minister of Health

Hon. Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye thanked the First Lady for setting the example as the Mother of the Nation. He regretted the fact that the HIV prevalence is escalating in the Bunyoro region, being one of the highest in Uganda. He called upon all the stakeholders to action.

“Thank you, Mama for choosing to Champion EMTCT and not any other cause. This is a cause closest to your heart; one of saving lives”.

Hon. Tumwesigye decried the fact that while the battle against MTCT is raging on, the country is equally confronted by the fact that now the number of men who have multiple partners is on the increase. One in four men has multiple partners, compared to one in three women. “There is need to increase primary prevention and to target couples in their homes for HIV testing, similar to the national strategy on Polio that targets babies at home, since only 55% of the men in Uganda are aware of their status” he said.

“Thank you, Mama for choosing to Champion EMTCT and not any other cause. This is a cause closest to your heart; one of saving lives”.
Hon. Minister of Health



Hon Min of Health Dr.Elioda Tumwesigye addressing the stakeholders at the consultative meeting.

He emphasized the importance of fighting the scourge since Uganda currently has a big funding gap and cannot raise the resources to treat all those who are infected in the next three years. Currently the cost of putting all those infected on treatment is 640 million shillings in addition to the existing funds.

He concluded his remarks by appreciating the UN family for funding the Mid-Western Region Campaign and for further commitment to support Uganda in this noble cause. He thanked all the Development Partners and the key stakeholders who have tirelessly worked together, to ensure an HIV Free Generation.

3.2 Remarks by the First Lady and EMTCT Champion

The First Lady and EMTCT Champion Hon. Janet Kataha Museveni shared her concern over the 30 year battle against HIV and AIDS pointing out that the children who witnessed the genesis of the epidemic, are now grown adults with their own children.

Drawing on the words of Ms. Lisa Godwin regarding the need to work together to address this cause, the Champion shared a story about an old lady who mobilised her community to join hands to find a lost child, after individual efforts had failed. With this joint effort the child was found quickly but too late, since he was already dead. She pointed out the moral of the story as "... joint efforts register results in a much shorter time than when people go it alone".

"We must walk this journey together and remember that this is an investment we are making for our children; the future generation, the hope for tomorrow"

EMTCT Champion

Hon. Janet Museveni pointed out that the time has come when every Ugandan must join the effort to fight the Scourge, so as to continue and sustain the momentum built during the EMTCT Campaigns nationwide or else the impact of these efforts may die out.



The EMTCT Champion addressing the stakeholders at the consultative meeting

“The period in which Uganda was applauded for our efforts in fighting the Campaign was at a time when people decided to exercise self discipline, a time when Abstinence and Faithfulness were the key message and not condom use”. “Today parents have opened the door for HIV and AIDS to come into the home by modeling the fact that it is okay to have extra marital relationships and this is a shame” she said.

She shared her concern over the shortfall in funding that is used to ensure that all those infected are put on treatment, pointing out that there was a time when Uganda was self reliant in the provision of food stuff for her people. She observed that similarly, if everyone played their part and joined hands to address the scourge the need for funding would reduce.

She thanked the UN Family and all the stakeholders present for walking this journey with her and urged them to work together to fulfill the dream of an HIV Free Generation.

4.0 The Public Rally held at Booma Grounds

4.1 Remarks by the Director General Ministry of Health

The Director General Health Services Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng welcomed the Champion to the public rally, stating that the Campaigns she has been spear heading for the last two years have had a formidable impact. She pointed out that statistics indicate that the efforts have not been in vain and once again another region of the Country is witnessing the fact that with concerted effort the number of babies born with the Virus can be reduced.

She expressed her gratitude to the development partners and all the stakeholders who have rendered their support to the Campaigns nationwide and thanked the people of the Region for their response to the Campaign which she said is commendable.

4.2 Remarks by the LCV Chairperson Hoima District

The Chairman LCV Hoima District Mr. George Bakonza welcomed the First Lady and EMTCT Champion to Bunyoro and thanked her and the President for all the work they have done in the area of HIV and AIDS. While referring to the book of James in the bible he thanked her and H.E. the President for the quick response to the HIV and AIDS scourge in the early eighties saying that “true religion is caring for widows and orphans”.

He appealed to the district leadership and officials from the MOH to place emphasis on strengthening the Health Center II facilities, since they are the nearest point of health care for hundreds of people in the District. These facilities require support to respond to the increasing cases of prostate cancer and cancer of the uterus among other ailments. He urged the Implementing Partners to involve women groups such as the Christian Women, Mothers Union and other associations in the work they are doing. He wished the dignitaries a pleasant stay in Hoima.

4.3 Remarks by the representative of the US Ambassador to Uganda

Dr Steve Wiserman the Director Center for Disease Control represented H. E. the Ambassador of the US to Uganda. In his remarks he referred to the story told by the EMTCT Champion at the Consultative Meeting that called upon all the stakeholders to work together to fight HIV and AIDS; saying that is truly what the USA is doing in Uganda.

While Uganda has an amazing story about the battle against HIV and AIDS, these efforts are still not enough and that is why the Campaign still goes on. Consequently the US continues to pledge support to these efforts and urges the women and men of Uganda who have not yet taken that bold step to test to do so, since the percentage of, particularly men who do not know their status is still very high.



US Ambassador Representative and CDC Country Director addressing the masses at Booma grounds in Hoima

“We are here today because we have the tools and leadership in the communities, we are here today because one child infected is a tragedy and we are here today because victory is in reach!” he said.

Dr. Wiserman thanked the Champion for rejuvenating interest to reaching the goal of an HIV free generation; saying that the people of the US will work with Ugandans to make this a reality.

*“We are here today because
we have the tools and
leadership in the communities,
we are here today because
one child infected is a tragedy
and we are here today
because victory is in reach!”*

*Dr. Wiserman representing the
US Ambassador*

4.4 Remarks by the UNICEF Representative

The UNICEF Representative Ms. Aida Girma spoke on behalf of the UN family. She remarked about the work the EMTCT Champion has done through the Regional Campaigns, noting that through her support outstanding results are being registered.

As a result of her leadership 85% of the HIV positive mothers accessing ANC are able to get ARTs, to avoid the vertical spread of the disease. This achievement must be celebrated.



UNICEF Country Rep Ms.Aida Girma making her remarks

Ms. Aida Girma however noted that there is still need to among other things, accelerate treatment for children, since the testing and coverage have lagged behind with less than 40% of identified children, now initiated for treatment. Furthermore there has to be renewed effort to strengthen the health system because it remains weak; with midwives and other health workers currently being over stretched. It is also important to provide information and access to promote greater involvement of men and to increase the coverage of SMC which stands at an all low 30%. Efforts should also be made to focus attention on the adolescents since teenage pregnancies have a higher rate of birth complications. She assured the gathering that the UN Family is committed to further supporting Government so as to ensure that those infected get the care and compassion they deserve.

4.5 Remarks by the UNAIDS Director Global Plan and Global Fund

The UN AIDS Director Global Plan and Global Fund Ms. Deborah Von Zinkermagel pointed out that the Campaign offers a platform to share successes and appreciate the strong leadership and commitment from the First Lady of Uganda to ending the new HIV infections among babies.

"We have the tools, skills and knowledge to ensure that no child is born with HIV.

If we stand together as we have done today, we can win this battle by ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030".

UN AIDS Director Global Plan and Global Fund, Ms. Deborah Von Zinkermagel

She thanked the MOH for the continued Campaign to eliminate vertical transmission of HIV in Uganda, through the decentralized delivery of HIV services. This has helped enable families to access health services without walking long distances. Currently 100% of the national and district referral hospitals and 97% of health Center IVs provide HIV services this is commendable.

Ms. Von Zinkermagel however noted that there is need to continue making services available at the lowest level of communities. While Uganda registered an increase in the number of children on ART from 9% in 2009 to 22% in

2013, more can done to ensure that at least 90% of the children living with HIV receive ARVs. She urged stakeholders to be innovative in the design and targeting of HIV programmes and the prudent use of the existing scarce resources. Accountability systems must be strengthened and the barriers to efficient implementation removed.



Ms Deborah Von Zinkermagel addressing the masses

She concluded her remarks saying: "I take back memories of this event, the commitment of MOH and the dedication of the First Lady.

We have the tools, skills and knowledge to ensure that no child is born with HIV. If we stand together as we have done today we can win this battle by ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030”.

4.6 Remarks by the Deputy Prime Minister Bunyoro Kingdom

The Deputy Prime Minister of Bunyoro conveyed salutations to the First Lady, from His Royal Highness the King of Bunyoro. He appreciated the First Lady and EMTCT Champion for her love for the nation and her efforts in the battle against HIV; stating that she is a woman of integrity and a good role model.

He shared the role the Kingdom continues to play in the HIV response which includes: mobilising communities, promoting behavioral change, as well as sensitisation against the vices of widow inheritance and domestic violence. The Kingdom has also established partnerships with Government through the UAC and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

He drew the Champion’s attention to the fact that while the Kingdom is grateful for the allocation of 1% of the oil revenue to its coffers the King requires additional funds to be able to promote his development projects. He decried the fact that there is a high shortage of medical workers in the health centers; a problem that is further compounded by the inadequate number of nursing schools in the Region and the fact that the University in Hoima does not offer courses in the field of sciences.

He expressed gratitude to the development partners and NGOs that have continued to support the Kings subjects to address poverty and other socio-economic issues. He wished all those visiting the Region a pleasurable stay.

Testimony on the effectiveness of Option B Plus and a Poem on HIV.

A testimony was shared by a husband and wife who were HIV positive and gave birth to three HIV negative babies with the help of Option B plus. Below is a summary of the Testimony:

Mary (her real name withheld) found out she was HIV negative while her husband was HIV positive. However they never went on ARTs for 2 years and she later contracted the virus and learnt of this when she was 7 months pregnant. She attended the ANC where she was placed on drugs to protect her baby from the virus. Her husband stood with her and she gave birth at the Health facility to an HIV negative baby. She was told to breast feed her baby exclusively for six months and when she weaned him he tested HIV negative. She has since given birth to two other HIV negative children.

Margaret and her husband called upon the gathering to test for the virus and to follow medication if found HIV positive.

The Poem - Listen to my Heart Speak

Ms. Esther Ahumuza shared a poem she wrote on HIV entitled “Listen to my Heart Speak”, in which she shares about how communities shun and discriminate against people with the virus. The mocking and teasing and the challenges of feeding are at the center of the Poem. Her break through comes with counseling, eating healthy food and getting treatment, as she listens to her heart speak.

4.7 Remarks by the Woman Member of Parliament Hoima District

The Woman MP Hoima District Hon. Tophas Kaahwa welcomed the EMTCT Champion to Hoima District. She introduced the MPs present at the event and thanked them for their solidarity.

She shared her concerns about the inadequate health facilities in the Region, pointing out that many women die in labour because of issues of lack of accessibility to the health services and the limited number of midwives. She called upon the MOH to address this issue pointing out that the area is affected by the large influx of women from DRC and the congested refugee camp.



Hon .Tophas Kaahwa making her remarks at the public rally

She thanked the MOH team and the Champion for their tireless efforts, leadership and commitment, the district leadership for rallying around the cause. She introduced the women groups present and thanked them for heeding to the call to participate in the Campaign.

4.8 Remarks by the Minister for State for Primary Health Care

Hon. Sarah Opendi the Minister of State for Primary Health Care observed that the involvement of the First Lady as EMTCT Champion brought a great change in the landscape of Mother to Child Transmission of the Virus. When the Campaign began in 2013 the statistics were alarming. There were 28,000 children born with HIV, since that time the number has gone down to below 8,000 children.

Hon. Opendi observed that this number of babies is still high considering the fact that it is hoped that by 2016, every baby will be born HIV free. She urged every Ugandan to test and take the messages on EMTCT seriously. She shared the story of a mentally challenged woman who had delivered a baby boy at the Azur Christian Health facility and left him there. “Since a mentally challenged woman can heed EMTCT messages, surely every woman must be able to do the same” she said.

Drawing from the global level Hon. Opendi shared the 90-90-90 target that has been set to ensure that the world ends the AIDS epidemic by 2030, by making certain that:

- 90% of all the people living with HIV will know their HIV status;

- 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained antiretroviral therapy; and
- 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will have suppression by 2020

She pointed out that those countries that are already enlisted to meet the targets have observe a National Day of HIV Testing such as in Geneva where everyone goes for HIV testing on that day. She appealed to the gathering to live responsible lives and to avoid spreading the virus to the innocent girls and children in the nation.

4.9 Remarks by the Minister for Health

The Hon. Minister of Health Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye shared his dismay over the high HIV prevalence rate in the Region. Every hour 14 people in Uganda contract HIV. Every 3 hours 14 people die of AIDS. He likened this number to one taxi crashing every 3 hours.

Dr. Elioda elaborated what communities and individuals need to do to address this catastrophe namely:

- Ensure that all the women who are able to give birth do not get HIV
- Ensure that HIV positive women of reproductive age bracket get pregnant out of choice.
- See to it that those women who are pregnant test, and that if they are positive are placed on treatment and that they deliver at a health facility.
- Ensure provision of comprehensive care to HIV infected children and women as well as their families.

He applauded the EMTCT Champion and the Government of Uganda as well as all the development partners for their commitment to bringing the epidemic to an end amongst babies and the people of Uganda in general.

Dr. Tumwesigye made a passionate appeal to the children of Uganda not to have sexual relationships until they are adults. Married couples should be faithful to their spouses and everyone should take an HIV test. He pointed out that the MOH will soon begin taking the HIV testing kits to the household level to encourage everyone to take the test similar to action taken for polio immunisation at household level.

5.0 Address by the First Lady and Champion EMTCT

The First Lady and EMTCT Champion Hon. Janet Kataha Museveni made reference to the African culture of “raising an alarm in the time of crisis or disaster” stating that: “Today I come not to visit Hoima district, but to make an alarm about the escalating prevalence of HIV in the Region, which at 8.2% is alarming”. She observed that the HIV prevalence in the Region is one of the highest in the nation and this is cause for concern.

She called upon parents to play their role and counsel their children not to go astray stating that one does not need any level of education to instill a disciplined lifestyle in children. She pointed out that Uganda’s hope for fighting HIV is in her people and it was the strategy of prevention through behavioral change that earned Uganda merit, for handling the Scourge when it first began.

Efforts to address HIV lie at the family level; when couples decide to test and respond to health care advice from the medical workers. Parents should be role models to their children, since children learn from what they do not and not what they say. The failure of men to get involved in the health of their families can be likened to a father leaving the door open at night; permitting all the wild animals to enter the home. “HIV and AIDS is like a snake, if it enters your home, your family will be harmed. Parents should set the example and tell their children to abstain from pre-marital sex” she said.

The EMTCT Champion thanked all the stakeholders in the Region for their commitment to scaling up service delivery, noting that the impact of the Campaign in a record 2 months is monumental. She noted that 943 couples with a total of 34,632 people were reached with HIV prevention messages. 34,138 people were tested with an overall HIV prevalence of 1.7%, which was much lower than the 8.2% prevalence in the region. She challenged the stakeholders to continue the work to ensure these efforts are sustained.

Hon. Kataha Museveni applauded His Royal Highness the King of Bunyoro, for working with the Church to fight witchcraft in the Kingdom. She urged stakeholders to address the issue of young girls who get pregnant and contract the virus; warning Christian women groups that God would hold them accountable for not guiding the young people, the same way He held Eli in the bible accountable for the errant ways of his sons. Indeed, because Eli did not discipline his sons he died with them.

“Today I come not to visit Hoima district, but to make an alarm about the escalating prevalence of HIV in the Region, which at 8.2% is alarming”.

Hon. Janet Museveni EMTCT Champion



The EMTCT Champion making her remarks to the masses at Booma Grounds Hoima

Conclusion

The Public Rally held at Booma Grounds was a resounding success. Large crowds braved the afternoon drizzle waiting patiently to catch a glimpse of the Champion and hear her message on EMTCT. The people had the opportunity to learn more about HIV and AIDS from the colorful and informative exhibition tents. Messages on EMTCT were relayed by school children and different drama groups who sang songs and acted plays relevant to the day's theme. Likewise the speeches made by the different dignitaries and the First Lady brought home the need and urgency to renew efforts in the battle against HIV and AIDS and for individuals, families and communities to embrace the new found hope in protecting babies from contracting the Virus.

On the other hand the Consultative Meeting drew the attention of key stakeholders to the challenges of implementing couple testing in the Region. The participants were presented with a Status Report on EMTCT in the Region and the progress made in the two month campaign period.

The Report stated that the Region saw a rise in: the number of communities reached with messages on HIV and EMTCT, access to service delivery and the mothers that attended the ANC during the period.

The Meeting discussed issues hindering the realization of couple testing and identified means to address these hindrances. Some of the proposals made to address these hindrances were: sensitisation to counteract issues of stigma and cultural beliefs that hinder the utilization of HCT and ANC, promoting different health packages to attract male attendance at the ANC, improving the supply chain and logistics management, promoting adolescent friendly health services and promoting the economic empowerment of women to address the gender dynamics that impact on their access to reproductive health services.

PICTORIAL



