

tries surrounding us who come to bank child, you need an egg from a woman, and

How sperm and egg banks work in Uganda

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Assisted reproductive technology in Uganda has come a long way and what was thought impossible is now possible in Kampala.

For more than a decade now, both sperm and egg banks have been operating in Kampala for those who do not have the natural ability to have children.

In 2005, a sperm and egg bank was opened at Women's International Hospital and Fertility Centre, a private health facility in Kampala. The facility specialises in treating infertility problems in both men and women. The hospital director, Dr Tamale Sali, says the bank in Uganda aims at helping people who, for one reason or another, have not been able to have children.

"There are some women who have not got a husband or married but they want to have children. We check them to see if they don't have psychiatric problem before helping them," says Dr Sali.

Beneficiaries

Since its inception, 15 single parents have been able to access sperms from the bank. Dr Sali says most of their clients are women in their menopause, and they get what is known as adopted embryos, meaning both the egg and the sperms are unknown.

"However, the recipients are subjected to a rigorous background check. We interview their families and make sure they have a family support," he says.

The whole process of preparing the mother and the growing of the embryo until they are transferred into her womb for implant costs between \$5,000 (Shs18m) and \$7,000 (Shs25m).

He adds that it is mostly women who have reached menopause with no children that are going to have adopted embryos. But he says even young ones have turned up for the

service and they have been turned away.

"We discourage young ladies from using donated sperms because as the child grows, it's bound to ask for the dad. To avoid such tricky situations, we encourage them to have a known man even if they are not sexually involved to come and donate the sperms."

Dr Sali says there are some rare cases who come and say they do not want to get married but they want to

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DR TAMALE SALI, DIRECTOR WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL HOSPITAL AND FERTILITY CENTRE

have children, for instance nuns.

"I have had a nun who told me; 'look I am not allowed to marry but I want a child.'" She got a friend who donated sperms and delivered about eight years ago. I have had several nuns but they don't come dressed in their official attires," he explains.

The sperms and the eggs kept in the bank are received as donations though there are people who ask for payments. There is, however, a criteria for donation.

"We make sure the donor does not have a history of [mental illness], is HIV negative and does not have Hepatitis. Education level is also important and this accounts for 30 per cent but we also consider a person's IQ. If one's IQ is low, we don't take the offer because this may be reflected on the child," he says.

For those who want to be paid, there are parameters. For a sperm donor, the minimum is Shs100,000 but it can go up to Shs300,000 depending on the IQ level. For the women, it ranges between Shs1 million and Shs3 million.

MORE UGANDANS EMBRACE SPERM BANKING

A mixed bag of economic conditions has turned human sperms into a commodity that men around East Africa are ready to spend money to preserve so as to impregnate their wives during their absence from home.

According to Dr Tamale Sali, the proprietor of Women's International Hospital and Fertility Centre, men all over East Africa, are flocking the Bukoto-based fertility hospital to bank their sperms at a fee.

category of men banking their sperm is those diagnosed with cancer and those going to war zones.

Asked how long the sperm can survive, he says it can live up to 100 years and depending on the banker, the annual cost of keeping the sperm can be from \$200. When this newspaper visited the Bukoto-based facility last week, it was a market of patients with different fertility needs.

By Stephen Otage