



WATER CRISIS

Deadly

Children share water with animals at River Nsasi in Ibanda District recently. There has been a water crisis in the sub-region, thereby forcing people to use contaminated water. PHOTO BY FEDNANO TUHAME

Stigma affecting HIV/Aids fight in Kasese, Kabarole

Stigma. Many people living with the virus fear to disclose their status due to fear of discrimination.

BY FELIX BASIIME
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KASESE. Sarah (not real names), 13, stays with her mother, Margaret Birungi at Nyakasanga West in Kasese Municipality, Kasese District. Both daughter and mother are living with HIV/Aids. Sarah's father died five years ago.

As a single mother of five, Birungi could not afford staying in town with the family and decided to send Sarah and her siblings to her grandparents in Kibiito, Kabarole District in 2015.

In Kibiito, Sarah joined Mugoma B Primary School, where she dropped out in Primary Three due to stigmatisation.

"She had to leave school due to stigmatisation from her peers and teachers. Pupils would laugh at her for taking ARVs, while teachers would beat her for not performing well in class as she would most of the time miss classes due to sickness," her mother recalls. She adds that her family was forced to relocate to their current residence in Kasese, where she believed the stigmatisation would be less and also live in better social and economic conditions.

Birungi says even when she [Sarah] fetched water at the borehole in the village, other people would not use it, claiming they would contract the disease.

"I asked myself why I was the only one taking drugs daily and my other siblings didn't," Sarah narrated her ordeal to *Daily Monitor* in an interview recently.

Though the family relocated to

THE RATES

Prevalence rates. HIV/Aids prevalence rate in Kasese District is at 8 per cent, but higher in the urban centre at 13 per cent and lower in the hard-to-reach hilly areas at four per cent, according to Faith Makombi Kwebaze, the programmes coordinator at National Community of Women Living with HIV/Aids (NACWOLA).

Kasese Town, Sarah hasn't resumed school as she and her mother spend most of the time attending clinics at St Paul's Health Centre IV.

Birungi says: "Yes, we are now in town, there is less stigmatisation, and better feeding but I cannot afford school fees for Sarah."

However, despite the interventions by government and other stakeholders, including NGOs, stigmatisation is still a big hurdle in the fight against HIV/Aids.

According to Faith Makombi Kwebaze, the programmes coordinator at National Community of Women Living with HIV/Aids (Nacwola), an NGO based in Kasese, out of 6,800 children in their area of coverage, only 3,500 can disclose their sero status.

Nacwola covers Kasese, Rubirizi, Kiruhura and Sheema districts.

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briefly

Cattle disease on the rise

MBARARA: Veterinary officials in Mbarara District have decried the rising cases of foot-and-mouth disease in the district. According to Dr Deogratius Begumisa, the district senior veterinary, the number of infected animals has increased from 120 last week to 372 this week. Farmers blame the spread of the disease on the uncontrolled animal movements within the sub-region. Cattle traders accused their counterparts in the neighbouring Isingiro District of buying animals from Tanzania where the disease is rampant. [Fred Anyine]

Bishop wants govt funding

KANUNGU: Kinkizi Bishop Dan Zoreka has asked government to fund religious institutions to promote environmental conservation and reverse climate changes and the resultant drought that has caused food crisis in the country. Bishop Zoreka was addressing Kanungu District leaders and a technical team from the Ministry of Water and Environment at the district council hall during the environmental stakeholders meeting on Tuesday. He said many people are quietly dying of hunger and that the church cannot do much by preaching to hungry people. [Felix Ainebyoona]

Stigma affecting HIV/Aids fight in Kasese, Kabarole

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"Stigmatisation and discrimination is still there, especially among the married couples. This is because most men have limited information about HIV/Aids prevention," Makombi explains.

"Women test for HIV/Aids but when they go back home and disclose their positive status to their husbands and other family members, they are discriminated against and the family breaks up," Makombi adds.

Nachwola community volunteers (individuals living with HIV/Aids) have come up to offer free counselling services to people living with HIV/Aids as one of the ways to fight stigmatisation.

"We have community volunteers and in schools, our monitors go there to teach life skills to pupils," she adds.

At St Paul's Health Centre IV, where both Sarah and her mother Birungi attend weekly clinics, Annet Bintu, a psychological councillor, says they have tried to reduce stigmatisation through counselling.

"We have 59 children who attend our clinics and we have fought stigmatisation up to 65 per cent, which means out of 100 people, 65 can disclose their zero status," Bintu says.

According to John Thawite, the Kasese District HIV/Aids coordinator, stigmatisation is one of the biggest challenges they are facing in the fight against HIV/Aids.

"Some people have failed to disclose their status because of stigma from the public," he says.

As a mitigation measure, he says the district authorities have embarked on counselling, especially to the young ones and married couples.

"We have also set up sub-county HIV/Aids committees where we train members to support others. We further encourage teachers to talk about HIV/Aids in classes," he says.

He adds that as a district, they are about to release a five-year HIV/Aids plan with more interventions, including carrying out a stigmatisation and discrimination survey in the district.

"This survey on stigma and discrimination will give us a direction on more strategies," he adds.

Voices



"She [Sarah*] had to leave school due to stigmatisation from her peers and teachers. Pupils would laugh at her for taking ARVs, while teachers would beat her for not performing well in class as she would miss most of the time due to sickness."

MARGARET BIRUNGI, SARAH'S MOTHER.

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FAITH MAKOMBI KWEBAZE THE PROGRAMMES COORDINATOR AT NACWOLA.

briefly

Residents reject land Bill

KIBAALE: Residents of Kibaale District have rejected government's proposed Land Amendment where government is seeking compulsory acquisition of land before...

Men tipped on br

MBARARA: The Mbarara district health office...