

US donates sh100b to boost health in Acholi

By Martin Kitubi

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has launched a new \$28.3m (about sh101.5b) initiative to strengthen health services in the Acholi region, which covers districts of Gulu, Agago, Amuru, Kitgum, Nwoya, Lamwo and Pader.

The five-year project is dubbed the Regional Health Integration to Enhance Services in Northern Uganda, Acholi (RHITES-Acholi).

USAID has contracted University Research Co. LLC, a global health organisation with a long history of service in Uganda to implement the project.

"Working with local partners, the RHITES-Acholi activity will increase healthcare provider availability, improve access to medications and commodities," the US Embassy said in a press release yesterday.

With its offices in Kampala, the University Research Co. LLC is known for building systematic capacity to improve health outcomes, global health security and accelerating progress toward a world safe from infectious disease threats.

The organisation also conducts social behaviour change communication, research and evaluation.

Dr Patrick Odongo Olwedo, the Amuru district health officer (DHO), applauded USAID and urged that part of the donation is channelled to construction of maternity facilities at health centres, equipping them with beds, surgical and diagnostic equipment, like gloves and microscopes.

Emmanuel Otto, the Agago DHO, requested that the funds be used to recruit more qualified health workers in the district.

Other key areas he requests to be addressed urgently include infrastructure development, antenatal care, HIV/AIDS testing, treatment and awareness.

DISTRICTS REACT

According to Dorothy Nanyonga, an information assistant at the US Embassy in Uganda, the funds will promote effective equipment operation and maintenance as well

as improve the management of health services.

Additionally, the activity will promote the adoption of healthy behaviour by raising awareness at the individual, provider and community level, with the aim of reducing delays in seeking care and lowering barriers to service usage.

"The activity will not purchase medicines, but will work to increase the effectiveness of the supply chain, reducing stock-outs of essential medicines and commodities, such as ARVs, insecticide-treated nets, various vaccines, artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACTs) and essential medicines such as oral rehydration salts/zinc and antibiotics," Phil Dimon, the spokesperson of the US Embassy, Kampala, said.

Health status of Acholi sub-region

According to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2016, 39% of Acholi women aged 15 to 49 years have unmet needs regarding family planning.

Furthermore, Acholi sub-region is among sub-regions with highest percentages of stunted growth among children below five years together with Toro, Bunyoro, Karamoja and Bugisu. This reflected a need to increase children's nutrition.