



Prof. David Lagoro of Gulu University gives a statement in Parliament on the research findings regarding nodding disease syndrome in northern Uganda during plenary yesterday. Photo by Miriam Namutebi

MPs demand sh1.2b for nodding disease

By Moses Mulondo and John Odyek

Parliament has directed the Government to release sh1.2b required for running of two centres for the treatment of the victims of the nodding disease syndrome in northern Uganda.

The MPs, including the Deputy Speaker Jacob Oulanyah, in a highly charged debate on the matter, yesterday overwhelmingly rejected a statement presented by the state minister for health, Sarah Opendi, on what the ministry has been doing about the disease.

The legislators faulted the minister's statement for lacking specific details on what government is doing in the treatment of the victims of the disease.

The minister regrettably informed Parliament that out of sh1.8b the Government had allocated towards the facilitation of teams managing the disease, only sh237m could be accounted for.

The minister also said an NGO, Hope for Humans had continued to help the victims of the disease.

On the rate of infection, the minister said 2,143 children were affected of whom 137 had died.

After the minister had presented her statement, the Deputy Speaker, who has recently been critical of the Government's failure to help nodding disease victims, said: "This is just a modified version of the same statement that has been circulating in public. Statements have been made and are attributed to politicking."

It is at that point that Oulanyah called Prof. David Kitara Lagoro, who has been working with Hope for Humans, to present the actual picture of what is on the ground and what needs to be done.

Prof. Lagoro, who works at Gulu University, said the World Health Centre marked southern Tanzania, South Sudan and northern Uganda as the centres for

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the nodding disease in Africa.

He told Parliament that whereas centres established by Hope for Humans had rehabilitated the victims to near normal life, the foreign funder had last year withdrawn after getting financially constrained and since then many victims had died and others had deteriorated.

Arguing that there is unique treatment they have been offering in the centres like biotic anti-seizure medicines which are not offered in government facilities, he said it is necessary for the Government to take over the centres which have experience in managing the disease.

Prof. Lagoro said only sh50m was required to run each of the two centres per month, which in a year would come to sh1.2b

Agago Woman MP Franca Akello said: "We need the Minister of Health, Ruth Aceng, to apologise to the country for saying there are no new cases of the nodding disease."

Nyabushozi County MP Fred Mwesigye blasted the health minister and her deputies for being elusive and failing to

help the suffering children of Uganda.

Kitigum Woman MP Beatrice Anywar said: "There has been a lot of politicking and it causes pain to affected families. I am really disappointed by the Minister for Health, Ruth Aceng, over what she said. Dr Suzan, who has been helping these children left the country, but she is willing to come back and help if the Government is committed to allocating resources to run the centres."

Adjumani Woman MP Jessica Ababiku said: "It is disturbing that the Government is not seriously intervening on a disease that is attacking our young generation. Our government must take the lead in treating these children not NGOs. It is embarrassing to our country."

Mbale Woman MP Connie Galiwango said: "We have been told in the current year that the Government allocated only sh33m this year. That is like condemning children to death because it is too little. It is the role of Parliament to appropriate money. Let us allocate the money required."

Kasilo County MP Elijah Okupa said: "We don't even need to raise a supplementary budget. Let the finance ministry release the sh1.2b. Let the lady who started the centres be called back and be contracted to help the children."

After a long heated debate that went on for about three hours, Opendi apologised to the nation. The Government had not done enough to handle the disease, she said.

She assured Parliament that they would urgently look for the required money and even take over the funding of the two centres started by Hope for Humans.

The state minister for planning, David Bahati, said: "This is an emergency. We shall sit tomorrow and see how to get the required resources."

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By Paul K

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