



Prime Minister Rugunda (right) chairing a meeting in his office on revitalising nodding syndrome response

Govt sets aside sh1.4b for nodding disease

By Taddeo Bwambale

The Government has set aside sh1.4b emergency fund to boost interventions against nodding disease syndrome in northern Uganda.

The allocation of the funds was agreed upon at a meeting chaired by the Prime Minister, Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, at his office in Kampala on Tuesday.

The meeting was attended by the acting health minister, Dr Chris Baryomunsi, finance state minister David Bahati, officials from the ministries of health and gender as well as health officials from the affected districts of Kitgum, Pader, Amuru, Gulu and Omoro.

The Office of the Prime Minister, in a press statement yesterday, said the funding was targeting about 3,000 patients under an emergency response plan.

"The funds for the emergency phase (March-June 2018) will be realised through internal budget reallocation within the health ministry and any gaps will be met by a request for additional funding from the finance ministry," the statement reads.

Under the new response plan, all the 3,000 patients will be provided with medicines (anticonvulsants) in addition to provision of food (posho and beans) for four months and non-food items including blankets, bedsheets and mattresses.

It was also resolved that the medium and long term activities to respond to the disease will be planned with the various line ministries/sectors.

Praise for health workers

Rugunda applauded health workers and local leaders for being at the forefront of treating patients of nodding disease and the communities, amid constraints.

"We should focus on empowering health workers with more skills so that they can easily reach out to patients, even in their homes," Rugunda said.

Rugunda directed the ministries of health and gender to work together and come up with a joint programme of intervention to address the socio-economic and psychological issues of the affected communities. He added that the health ministry should ascertain the exact number of nodding disease

THE PLAN

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patients and also categorise them according to the severity of cases.

The meeting also recommended that Gulu Hospital becomes the focal point and rehabilitation centre for handling complicated cases.

The director general of health services, Dr Henry Mwebesa, told the meeting that a team of officials from the health ministry had already met the district technical leadership to agree on the activities, budget implications and the implementation mechanism.

The establishment of the fund comes barely a week after an uproar from MPs over perceived

inadequate response to the nodding disease syndrome in northern Uganda.

Parliament report

During a plenary session, Prof. David Lagoro, an expert in the treatment and rehabilitation of children affected by the disease, told MPs that the only rehabilitation centre in Kitgum was closed in 2005.

He told the MPs that the Government would need to allocate at least sh1.2b annually to run at least two rehabilitation centres treating the condition.

Kilak County MP, Gilbert Olanya, told Parliament that the number of children affected so far stood at 3,145 while the deaths recorded were 1,120.

Nodding disease syndrome is a neurological disorder affecting the nervous system. It affects children between the age of three and 18 years.

The nodding disease syndrome presents with seizures, head nodding, cognitive impairment and multiple disabilities. The disease has also affected children in Tanzania and South Sudan.