First Lady urges medical workers not to shun hard-to-reach areas

By John Agaba

The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni has called on medical workers and nurses not to neglect hard-to-reach rural areas, where healthcare access is still a big challenge.

"Health is so important for all of us. And the majority of our people who need it are in villages, in hard-to-reach rural communities. I appeal to you to extend quality healthcare to these areas and to uphold the calling from God in your (nurses and midwives) motto *To Love and Serve* and provide the necessary care to patients in a selfless manner in whatever corner of the country," Mrs Museveni urged.

The First Lady was speaking at the Office of the Prime Minister after she released the May 2017 Uganda Nurses and Midwives Examination results on Friday.

A total of 4,326 nurses and midwives from 67 accredited nursing schools were presented for the Uganda Nurses and Midwives Examinations Board (UNMEB) May 2017 examinations, compared to 3,760 candidates that sat exams. A total of 3,112 were female and 1,214, male.

A total of 3,502 candidates passed at certificate level, while 439 at diploma. The total of ungraded candidates at certificate level stood at 268 (7%) and the unpresented at 59 (1.5%), while the total ungraded candidates at diploma level stood at 43 (8.7%) and the unpresented at 15 (3%).

Fifty-seven of the 67 institutions that presented students are privately owned. The rest are public.

Mrs. Museveni described the results as impressive.

"The number will significantly contribute to the existing health workforce in the country," she said.



Walusimbi handing over results for the nurses and midwives national examinations to Mrs Museveni at the Office of the Prime Minister in Kampala on Friday. Photo by Roderick Ahimbazwe

Calling for quality, the education minister said all training institutions "should take matters regarding professionalism, right attitude, etiquette, and empathy seriously" by making them central when training and assessing students.

"I call upon the education ministry departments and agencies responsible for standards and quality to closely monitor and identify gaps related to effective learning and teaching and effectively guide departments responsible for planning and budgeting to ensure that priority is given to these critical areas," she said.

The First Lady also said she was happy with efforts to include soft skills in the nursing and midwifery curricular, which would further empower the medical workers and improve their attitude, making them more empathetic and caring when "delivering professional work".

She said improvement of the education sector was one of the key issues on Uganda's development agenda.

In pursuit of this, the Government committed to undertake various measures that would ensure an education system that fulfilled the "broad expectations of the individual, as well as making available the requisite human resource capital for the country".

Here, the First Lady highlighted Universal Primary and Secondary Education interventions and the Government Student Loan Scheme, which are giving many a Ugandan children a chance to afford education.

She noted that the Government needs to train required human resources in psychiatry, to reduce the burden of mental illness, which she said was on the increase.

UNMEB's executive secretary, Helen Kataratambi, said results of 14 candidates had been temporarily withheld due to non-compliance to regulations governing the nurses examinations.

She, however, said there was a steady increase in demand for nursing and midwifery training. The number of nurses that sat in May depicted a 13% increase in the figures from last year.

UNMEB's chairperson, Hajat Mariam Walusimbi, highlighted the board's challenges, including inadequate transport facilities to deliver examinations to examination centres in time. She also highlighted inadequate training facilities in practical areas.

Mrs Museveni reaffirmed the Government's commitment to "prioritising and funding of specialised training institutions", among which included nursing and midwifery.

"My ministry will endeavour to address the presented and emerging challenges that affect the delivery of UNMEB mandate. It will undertake discussions with counterparts in the Ministry of Health, on matters regarding relationships between mentors and those mentored, equipping the practicum sites and upholding the values enclosed in the patients charter," the Minister of Education and Sports said.

Mrs Museveni said the inadequate transport facilities had been discussed by her technical team and would be taken into consideration.

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