New app to save young mothers

KANUNGU

By Abdulkarim Ssengendo

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in partnership with the Government of Uganda, have launched a technology-based application dubbed GetIN app, that is built to enable healthcare workers in the rural areas of Kanungu to reach socially-isolated young mothers.

The inaugural roll-out ceremony officiated by Kanungu district vice-chairman Gadi Byomuhangi, took place at Kanungu district headquarters last week.

According to Alain Sibenaler, the UNPFA country representative, the programme targets to help young mothers access antenatal care, skilled delivery and postpartum family planning services.

"The major aim of this programme is to increase pregnant girls' access to life-saving maternal health services through dedicated outreach by community health workers and midwives and reduce the work burden of community extension workers and midwives. It is also aimed at reducing the outreach and follow-up system with pregnant girls," he said.

Byomuhangi was impressed by 100 community health workers and 20 midwives who were trained on how to use the application. They were also provided with mobile handsets to digitally identify and record pregnant women.

These will be providing appointment reminders and reduce inefficiencies from a paper-based system of recording essential information and follow-up.

He said UNFPA will support the district to fully rollout this application in all parishes to ensure that pregnant women are identified and followed up in a timely manner, with a specific focus on young women.

Sibenaler said UNFPA has invested $100,000 to develop the app and has a target to roll it out in eight districts in northern Uganda by 2018.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

The GetIN app will provide appointment reminders and reduce inefficiencies from a paper-based system of recording essential information and follow-up.

"Kanungu has a youthful (below 24 years) population accounting for 57%. The teenage pregnancy rate is high at 50%, doubling the national average of 25%. The total fertility rate is 8.3%, skilled attendance at birth is 45%, and HIV prevalence rate of Kanugu is at 7.1%. It is, therefore, critical that the district is supported to undertake innovative solutions to turn around the poor sexual and reproductive health indicators," he said.

Sibenaler added that one in four young girls in Uganda gets pregnant or has already given birth by the age of 19.

"Girls between 15 and 19 years of age are three times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth than their counterparts aged 20 to 24,' he said.

He said early motherhood does not only increase the risk of dying in childbirth, it also jeopardises the wellbeing of mothers and their children. Sibenaler urged young pregnant women to use the innovation.

Ketty Tushabomwe, the district assistant health officer in charge of maternal and child health, called on parents and guardians to encourage young pregnant girls in their communities to consult health workers each time they have a concern about their health during pregnancy.

He also challenged health workers to reach out to young pregnant women with a friendly attitude and encourage them to access health services.

"We are grateful to the implementing partner for having brought this system. It will be of great help because it has been difficult for us to identify the pregnant mothers. Now that we have this system, it will help us identify them, which will go a long way in reducing maternal mortality rate," he said.

Kyarimpa Einid, a health worker from Kinaba sub-county, said the system will help them track pregnant mothers who have been facing birth complications.

"However, we still face challenges of poor road network, where vehicles and motorcycles cannot reach the people who live on top of the hills," she said.

Prosy Nuwamanya, a resident of Kanungu, said: "We have suffered for a long time with young pregnant mothers dying because of complications. We believe this programme will help to link young mothers to health centres. We thank UNPFA for all they have done for this district, including supporting our children to go back to school."