

# New Vision

ADVERTISER SUPPLEMENT

## WORLD POPULATION DAY

# All about the young people

By Caroline Arlba and Jaquiline Emodok

**J**ackline Bwire Nabwire is a community health worker in Busia district. She dropped out of school after P7. The importance of family planning only dawned on her after she began to face difficulty with feeding her seven children.

Her plight was highlighted in a documentary shown at the recent Pre-World Population Day public dialogue, organised by the National Population Council (NPC), with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

"The number of children was increasing, yet the food from the gardens was reducing. So, when I came across a programme that allowed me to start family planning, I embraced it," a shivery voiced Nabwire, now a mentor to other women, narrates how she takes charge of her life and helps others do the same. "Women were making two-hour-journeys to health centres for family planning, only to find empty shelves or no service providers. So, I was motivated to get trained and provide the services."

### World Population Day

Today, we are celebrating the World Population Day. This year's theme 'Strengthen youth competitiveness for sustainable development' is looking at the youth in general. This is just what Uganda needs.

In fact, Charles Musana, the senior national programme officer at the NPC, has adopted the theme to highlight the challenges that are faced by young people and improve their competitiveness therein.

Musana argues that investing in this age group will guarantee a healthy and skilled human resource. He further states that if provided with job opportunities, the youth will effectively contribute to harnessing Uganda's demographic dividend.

"A demographic dividend is the accelerated economic growth that may result from a decline in a country's mortality and fertility, and the subsequent change in the age structure of the population," Musana explains.

On a good note, the Population Reference



Filda Anicia, the head of Reproductive Health Uganda Gulu Branch, inserting an implant in the hand of a mother who wanted to space her children

Bureau (PRB) argues that the accelerated economic growth of the demographic dividend remains a possibility for many African nations. However, for the process to begin, countries must prioritise strategic investments to lower fertility (children per mother) and child mortality. PRB maintains that, until countries address their extremely young age structure through family planning, this will be a myth.

### Family planning

Dr Angella Akol, the country director of Family Health International (FHI) 360, says family planning is associated with the improvement of household economies and negotiating sexual activity. "Empowerment is defined as a process and a facilitator of contraceptive use," she says.

True to her word, the 2011 Uganda Demographic Health Survey (UDHS) states that women who can negotiate sex with their husbands are more likely to be using contraception. In Uganda, the contraceptive consumption rate currently stands at 39% and with the unmet need dropping from 34% in 2011, to 28% in 2016.

This percentage, according to Dinah Nakiganda, the acting assistant commissioner for reproductive health in the health ministry, says the ministry plans to further reduce the percentage to 10%, by 2020. She notes that family planning is not only a health sector problem, but also multi-

sectoral problem that stretches to the economic, education and gender sectors.

### Issues in family planning

Nakiganda argues that it all begins with child marriages, and, or, girls dropping out of school. "Child marriages are rampant. We even have politicians who attend child marriage ceremonies, despite knowing that they are unlawful and contribute to the country's high fertility rate," she says.

She reckons though that there is also the issue of unemployment and that once there is no money, a girl will get married, so that a man takes care of her.

She also says there are challenges in accessing commodities in remote areas, such as islands. There is also a challenge in humanitarian situations, for example with the influx of refugees, family planning is one of the last things considered after clothing and food," Nakiganda says.

She worries that the male involvement in family planning is still lacking, yet they (men) are crucial in promoting the use of family planning.

### Ray of hope

As many stakeholders gather at Madibira Primary School playgrounds in Busia district to commemorate this day, Musana says: "There has been notable improvement, which includes the decline in

total fertility rate from 6.9% in 1995 to 5.4% in 2016 and the increase in modern contraceptive usage, from 8% in 1995 to 35% in 2016," he offers.

Musana insists that the reduction in infant mortality from 81 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1995 to 43 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2016, is also commended.

"And also reduction in maternal mortality from 524 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1995 to 338 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2016 (UDHS 2016)," he adds.

However, he says despite the improvements, some challenges still prevail. These are high teenage pregnancies at 24.8%, (UDHS 2016), poor sanitation, poverty at 19.7%, (UNHS 2012/15), unemployment at 9.4% (UNHS 2012/15), school dropouts, and low immunisation against the killer diseases.

### Global perspective

Today is a global affair and the international theme looks at exploring family planning empowering people more. "Family Planning: Empowering People, Developing the Nation," it reads.

Globally, UNFPA's country representative Alain Sibenaler says strides have been made.

"This year's global theme provides us with an ideal opportunity to re-energise global commitment to rights-based family planning," he says.

He adds: "Today, because of the work of family planning, 2020 partners around the world, more women and girls than ever before are using modern contraception," he explains. "An unprecedented 290.6 million women and girls in the world's poorest countries are now able to decide for themselves whether and when to get pregnant."

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