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Kadaga launches five-year campaign against child marriages

KAMPALA. The Speaker of Parliament, Ms Rebecca Kadaga has launched a five-year campaign against child marriages and teenage pregnancies in Uganda.

Speaking at the launch in Kampala yesterday, Ms Kadaga, said several girls have fallen victim to preying men because education and health amenities are miles away from them.

“We need to take education and health facilities to where these girls are. They walk long a distance. One day I was in Tororo District and I was told girls walk 30km to and from school. There are animals and also men along the way. Girls have fallen

victims of robbery and murder,” she said.

The five-year campaign dubbed “*Leave Your Dream*”, is an initiative by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Ministry of Health.

The initiative will be implemented by, among others, Reach A Hand Uganda, a youth led organisation,

A 2010 report from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) dubbed, ‘*School Dropout: Patterns, Causes, Changes and Policies*’ indicates that some of the major causes of school dropouts include lack of interest, pregnancy, early marriages,

hidden costs at school and family responsibilities.

Teenage pregnancy in Uganda stands at 25 per cent and the rate of girls who marry before turning 18 at 49 per cent.

In 2013, Uganda was ranked 16 out of 25 countries with the highest rates of early marriages, with 46 per cent of girls marrying before 18 years, and 12 per cent before they are 15 years (World Vision, 2013).

In regions where girls are married before the legal age of 18, female secondary education is lower.

However, Ms Kadaga called upon parents and leaders to encourage

young people to earn their income so that they can stop being lured into early sex because of money demands.

46%

Early marriages. The percentage of girls who get married before turning 18 years of age in Uganda.

“We also need a way of encouraging young people to earn their income for instance from planting trees. We must find the way of speaking about that issue within our community. I don’t

know how many of us speak about it with our children,” she added.

The Speaker also challenged the Health Ministry to participate in campaigns against Female Genital Mutilation that is still being practiced in some areas of the country.

She said FMG just like teenage pregnancies and child marriages jeopardises girls’ rights to education, health and future survival.

The RAHU’s communications officer, Mr Ibrahim Batambuze, said they will roll out the campaign in every district of the country starting with Karamoja, that has high rates of child marriages and teenage pregnancies.