

# Nkondo clinic in family planning campaign

PICTURES BY TITUS KAKEMBO

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**M**alnourished children burst into a chorus of loud cries as each is put on a weighing scale. Their pale-looking mothers are not bothered by the shrieks flooding the small shop-turned-clinic.

Although the clinic has only one bed, residents of Nkondo are glad to receive the much-needed healthcare from there. Nkondo (or Kidera as it is commonly known) is a remote village in Budiope district, about an hour's drive from Jinja town.

"The clinic had been closed recently. Fortunately, Rotary Club Kampala North donated \$10,000 (about sh24m), which was used to re-open the clinic and buy medical equipment," said the area MP John Bosco Mubiito. "About sh3.6m was used to start a safe motherhood, child health and HIV/AIDS counselling and testing project."

When the clinic was closed, mothers had to walk for over eight kilometres to seek medical care.

## At the clinic

A number of mothers come in for antenatal and childcare services. Esther Nantambi, the head of Nkondo Health Centre, addresses the mothers: "To avoid overstretching your family income, come along with your husbands next time. I need to discuss with them the benefits of having a manageable family."

Many mothers murmur at the suggestion.

"You always promise not to get unwanted pregnancies, only to return within six months heavy with another baby," lamented Nantambi. "Fellow women, this puts your life at risk. Many women die in labour or from complications during pregnancy."

Seeing that the mothers were now attentive, Susan Namutebi, a nurse at the clinic, chips and says it is the women's duty to change the old belief.

"We ought to change the archaic belief that one's social status is determined by the number of children they have. What counts is the welfare of the child. Is the child receiving enough education that will enable him step in Rebecca Kadaga's shoes in Parliament or to become an MP of Budiope district?" Namutebi asks the mothers.

She explains that to avoid stunted growth, every mother should to give her baby fruits, porridge and fish. "A healthy child means a healthy nation," she stresses.

Turning to the few men present, Namutebi



Nantambi talks to the mothers at the clinic

tells them to allow their wives to breastfeed their babies and to also allow their bodies to rest so they have enough strength to cultivate food for their families.

"The fewer children you have, the better life you will live because then, you will have enough food and resources are not over stretched to raise and educate the children," she says.

Sylvia Namulondo, another nurse, preaches the gospel of cleanliness to the mothers.

"Handwashing and general cleanliness will save Nkondo from diseases like diarrhoea, scabies and jiggers," she says.

"Basic hygiene practices like washing the face, brushing the teeth and bathing will keep the doctor away. Keep your garbage in a pit, do not share rooms with livestock and drink boiled water to live a healthy life."

## Challenges

Namulondo says many mothers cannot afford to pay for healthcare. "The mothers have to pay sh2,000, but only a few can raise that money," she revealed.

The clinic always runs out of medical supplies as they take long to be delivered. Nkondo also loses many mothers to pregnancy and childbirth-related causes. Namulondo



The clinic suffers drug shortage

blames this on men who do not allow their wives access to family planning services.

"Many husbands do not allow their wives to use contraception. This stems from the belief that the more children a man has, the better his social standing amongst his peers. Remember, this is regardless of his income or occupation."

Namulondo also reveals that many men have misconceptions about family planning methods, which they claim have adverse side-effects on their wives, such as making them obese, moody and affecting their unborn children.

"Many mothers end up having children than they cannot afford to take care of. We have expectant mothers who have eight children yet they have not reached 40 years," says Namulondo.