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THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK**

**1-8<sup>th</sup> August 2018**

**Hon. Sarah Opendi**

**State Minister of Health in charge of General Duties**

**July 25<sup>th</sup> 2018**

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Hon. Speaker,

Hon. Members,

Every year, the World Breastfeeding Week is commemorated during the first week of August under a specific theme to raise awareness on Breastfeeding and its importance to both the mother and the child, increase breastfeeding rate, improve the health and survival of babies around the World.

Uganda is a signatory to the *Innocenti Declaration* of 1990 that declared the World Breastfeeding Week to promote, protect and support breastfeeding. This commitment was re-affirmed at the 2012 World Health Assembly that called upon member countries and all global actors to commit more actions and resources and to improve infant feeding practices.

Breastfeeding is the best start of life, provides perfect nutrition for babies, protects against diseases including Obesity and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in adulthood such as Cancer, Diabetes, High Blood Pressure among others, and improves intelligence quotient of children. Breast milk is the richest and unrivalled source for all the nutrients for human growth and survival of a child and the practice of breastfeeding a child is inherently human.

This year the World Breastfeeding Week will be held under the theme **“Breastfeeding: Foundation of Life”**. It will focus on three main aspects that are vital for the sustainable development of society:



- (1) Breastfeeding prevents malnutrition in all its forms.
- (2) Breastfeeding ensures food security for infants and young children.
- (3) Breastfeeding contributes to nourishing people and nations out of the hunger and poverty cycle.

In essence, Breastfeeding is a foundation of life and in this decade of action we should leave no one behind in giving our children a bright future.

### **Situation in Uganda**

The Ministry of Health recommends early initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour of delivery, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six completed months, introduction of complementary foods after 6 months while continuing to breastfeed for up to 2 years or beyond. Early initiation within the first hour stands at 67%, exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months at 66% and median duration of breastfeeding is 20 months.

However, we have a challenge of poor transition to and practice of complementary feeding. The Minimum Acceptable Diet; an indicator of adequate complementary feeding that uses frequency of complementary feeds, diversity of food used, and continued breastfeeding, is very low at only 14% in the country. In effect, the poor complementary feeding is one of the largest contributors to the 29% levels of stunting and early childhood illness. Anaemia also affects 53% of our children under five years of age.


### **Efforts by the Government**



The Government has put in place a number of measures to improve breastfeeding:

- (1) A conducive policy environment is in place as breastfeeding promotion is an integral component of the Second National Health Policy of 2010.
- (2) The Government is enforcing the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes. This is an international health policy framework for breastfeeding promotion adopted by the World Health Assembly (WHA) of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1981.
- (3) The Ministry of Health has developed and disseminated policy guidelines, Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials and learning aids on breastfeeding to support health workers in all health facilities and districts across the country to promote optimal breastfeeding as well as educate mothers on this important practice.
- (4) Government is supporting Baby Friendly Health Facilities, Communities and Workplaces. On behalf of my Ministry, I commend the Right Honourable Speaker and the Parliament of Uganda for leading by example by putting in place a Baby Friendly Care Centre for staff and members to care for their children with utmost joy and convenience. We hope other institutions and communities can learn from this effort of Parliament.

However, there are a number of challenges that need to be addressed in order to achieve good breastfeeding indicators in Uganda. The slow progress on some initiatives to promote, protect and support breastfeeding has been attributed to:



- (i) The overall human resource gaps which limits momentum in routine health and nutrition education to pregnant and lactating women.
- (ii) Inadequate funding to implement nutrition interventions to scale. Domestic budget allocation for nutrition and other primary health activities have relatively been smaller than required.
- (iii) Inadequate maternity protection legislation of 90 working days. Whereas this period is a good initial step, it is desirable to target the entire exclusive breastfeeding period of at least 6 months. In some other cases, private sector actors have often disregarded this provision of the law and they get away with it due to weak enforcement.

Inadequate public awareness on the value of optimal breastfeeding on the health of children and mothers. Many Ugandan women still lack the awareness of good breastfeeding practices, especially those who do not attend the required number of antenatal visits. It is vital to continuously disseminate information linking breastfeeding to improved cognitive development, productivity and increased Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for a country

### **Call to Action**

Right Honourable Speaker and Honourable Members, the case to invest in breastfeeding is critical to us as we move towards attainment of middle income status and attainment of the vision 2040. Investing in Breastfeeding saves lives and lays a foundation for a healthier and prosperous Uganda. We call upon your support to Government in the current efforts to:



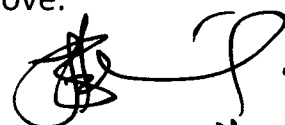
- (i) Increase public awareness and actions to promote, protect and support breastfeeding. We need to strengthen the implementation and monitoring of the Regulations on Marketing of breast milk substitutes to protect breastfeeding against aggressive marketing by infant food manufacturers.
- (ii) Increased domestic funding towards improvement of infant feeding practices and child nutrition. The budget for most of these activities is provided by development partners and we need to scale up when the resource envelope allows.
- (iii) Enforce the establishment of breastfeeding corners at workplaces in both the formal and informal sectors.
- (iv) Be part of the breastfeeding champions to promote, protect and support breastfeeding and making baby friendly communities in your respective districts and constituencies.

### **Date and Venue for National Commemoration**

The Ministry of Health and stakeholders will commemorate the World Breastfeeding Week in all districts of Uganda. We have communicated to all District Chief Administrative Officers and the District Health Management Teams to ensure district level commemoration activities are organised, including media promotion on this very important subject. We urge members to follow-up and take lead in their respective districts and constituencies.

The culmination of districts events will be a national celebration in Bulindi Primary School, Hoima District on Wednesday, 8 August, 2018. You are all welcome.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

  
July 25<sup>th</sup> 2018

Sarah Opendi (MP)

**Hon. Minister of State for Health in Charge of General Duties**