

## District leaders receive training on eradication of stunting.



Ministry of Local Government trained members of the District Nutrition Coordination Committees (DNCC) on nutrition governance as part of a program to eradicate stunting countrywide. The trainees included leaders from pilot districts under the National Information Platforms for Nutrition(NIPN) II project.

The training is part of government efforts to reduce levels of stunting across the country. According to the recent Uganda Demographic Health Survey carried out by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, stunting levels in Uganda are at currently at 22% and as high as 40% in some regions like Karamoja. There is need for more efforts if we are to achieve the target of 0% by 2040.

Speaking on behalf of permanent secretary Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) Ben Kumumanya, Victor Emmanuel Kimbowa the assistant commissioner in charge of finance and planning, highlighted the lack of information resulting in food misuse as a primary cause of malnutrition in Uganda.

“Despite Uganda being gifted by nature and being a food basket, we still have people who are stunted, wasted or malnourished and this affects their participation in the development of the country. Food is available but it is being misused” he said.

Kimbowa stated that there is a big correlation between poor nutrition and stunted brain development. The first 1000 days of human brain development are very important. These include nine months of pregnancy and 24 months after a child is born. This is the period within which the brain matures to its full capacity. In order to have a vibrant population, women and lactating mothers should be fed on a balanced diet that contains iron such as fortified beans, maize flour, wheat flour, in addition to fruits and vegetables.

The five- day workshop took place at the Source of the Nile hotel in Jinja city from 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2023. It was attended by staff from MoLG and leaders from Napak, Kasese, Kabarole, Namutumba, Bugiri, Kabong, Adjumani, Nebbi, Omoro, Kole, Bushenyi, Ntungamo, Kanungu and Rukiga districts.

James Bedijo Okumu, the chief administrative officer(CAO) Napak district, said that as district leaders they have the responsibility to sensitise communities to increase food production and enforce by-laws that encourage the people to practice good nutrition and participate in child health days.

Kimbowa advised the district leaders to include nutrition in their planning and budgeting for the district activities and also ensure that the DDNCs are operational. He recommended that two percent of the district or project budgets should be allocated for nutrition specific activities.

Kenneth Muzoora, the commercial officer Kabarole district, emphasized the importance of good governance to ensure policies are properly implemented.

According to Charles Asiimwe a facilitator at the workshop, brain stunting affects the social economic development of the country. However, because it is a silent killer it tends to be ignored by many stakeholders.

“There are many people in Uganda who are stunted and therefore unable to reason like adults and make meaningful decisions. For example, people driving on the wrong side of the road and failing to adhere to the laws, this could be an effect of stunting” said Asiimwe

With financial support from the European Union and technical assistance from UNICEF, government, is implementing NIPN II. The initiative feeds into the 2nd Uganda Nutrition Action Plan and is supporting 15 pilot districts in fighting malnutrition.

According to Elias Byamungu, CAO Kasese district, community engagement is vital for proper nutrition for children. Pregnant women need support from their families and communities to go for antenatal visits and deliver at the health centres in addition to taking their children for immunisation and early childhood development (ECD) days.

Employers should also create conditions that support women to exclusively breast feed for the first six months and later supplement breast milk with foods that constitute a balanced diet. **END**