

## END GENDER BASED VIOLENCE, MAKE FAMILY PLANNING ACCESSIBLE TO EMPOWER WOMEN

Priscillar Nabantazi, is a young lady in her mid 20's. She got married a year back, and is yet to have children. She made the decision of not having children until when the right time comes.

Nabatanzi says, she had to explain to her husband why this was not the right time to give birth immediately after marriage.

Unlike many Ugandan women she had to make a bold decision to tell her husband about the choice of family planning method she was to use.

Although she had no idea what the husband would say, she stood her ground and shared her feelings.

"I made the decision and shared with my husband. At first he did not like it but I engaged him and I actually asked him to decide on the best family method for us, which he did," Nabatanzi says.

Nabatanzi is one of the few women in Uganda who can stand up boldly and engage their male partners on issues regarding family planning.

Family planning is regarded as one of the best tools to make women empowered, according to Jackson Chekwoko, the executive director, Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU).

However in Uganda, less than a quarter of women of reproductive age are using modern contraception according to USAID.

Chekwoko says many young Ugandans have not embraced family planning, the reason we are seeing many unsafe abortions in the country.

He says about 26% of the maternal deaths is as a result of abortions and more than half of these happen in young people.

"We are seeing a lot of maternal deaths because of unsafe abortions. These abortions are a direct indication that women are not empowered," Chekwoko says.

He believes that if family planning services are scaled

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up these pregnancies that are aborted because they are unwanted and not planned will reduce.

Even in homes many households are poor because of the unplanned high numbers of children they produce.

"When we men space children, when they use family planning they are free to engage in in economic activities instead of staying home giving birth. When women's incomes increase they get empowered," Chekwoko says.

He explains that as RHU they are committed to seeing women are empowered.

"We continue to champion women empowerment, advocate for women's rights, call for allocation of more money for family planning and encourage women to access sexual reproductive services," Chekwoko says.

RHU has also embarked on the implementation of projects that are aimed at empowering women. Projects like, Prevention + and Woman Reproductive Rights Advocacy Project (WRAP).

Regarding the Prevention + project which is aimed at engaging boys and men to prevent Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Uganda.

Sam Mwandara, the project coordinator explains that the project is aimed at involving men in the fight against GBV .with a focus on: 1. reducing violence against women; and 2. Economic participation and self-reliance of women.

"Male involvement in the fight against GBV is vital. If men can understand this, we shall have confident women who are empowered and able to plan with their husbands," Mwandara says.

The main objectives of this 5-year project (2016-2020) are; enabling young people have violence free and gender justice (GJ) relations.

To change negative community perceptions, beliefs, values, attitudes and practices, to promote quality GBV services and mainstream gender transformative approaches (GTAs) in institutions and CSOs and an enabling and sustained policy environment.

GBV is still a big challenge in Uganda, with at least 56 % of women aged 15- 49 having experienced physical violence at least once in their lives.

"Women empowerment in this country is at varying levels. The educated are at least, but we can't claim women are empowered yet the majority who are in rural areas are still suffering which undermines the efforts to empower them," says Chekwoko.

Doreen Kansiime, the WRAP project coordinator says when a woman has a manageable family they contribute a lot to income generation.

"When you use family planning, you space your children well, this helps you keep health and plan for the family. As a woman when you are healthy, can work and earn income, you get empowered. That is why as RHU we are for advocating for reproductive rights including family planning," Kansiime says.

She challenged government to implement all policies aimed at addressing issues of women for empowerment.

"Many policies on women issues continue to lie idle in the shelves of policy makers But if we seriously implement them, our women would be empowered," Kansiime says.

Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU) is a Member Association of International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and was established in 1957. Under its new strategic plan 2016-2020, RHU envisions a Uganda where everyone's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are protected and fulfilled without discrimination.