The Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Prof. David Mwakyusa, said he hoped the newly commissioned training and research facility of the Mwanza Intervention Trials Unit (MITU), would become a “centre of excellence in research.”

The research facility, built on 2 million pound donation from the UK Medical Research Council, is expected to be used for running scientific conferences, research on HIV/AIDS to which, the Minister said, “will contribute to developing research capacity not only in Tanzania, but also in other countries within the region.”

Praising MITU, as a product of excellent long-term partnership between Tanzania’s National Institute of Medical Research (NIMR) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Minister said “the range of studies which have been conducted is impressive and the programme has received worldwide recognition for the quality of the research conducted and the resultant research portfolio here in the Mwanza and other areas in the Lake Zone.”

However, Mwakyusa urged the research to intensify their research on the HIV/AIDS pandemic since the prevalence and infections rates were alarming, and the statistics, he said, called for more research to develop and test new HIV prevention methods.

He said: “MITU is well positioned to build on the extensive record of achievements that preceded it to evaluate new interventions to reduce the burden of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.”

He mentioned development and application of microbicides, use of ARV on uninfected persons (pre-exposure prophylaxis), and development of vaccine for HIV as potential areas for further research by MITU.

The Minister, in his speech availed to AIDS WEEK, urges the institute to be steadfast to its goal of developing human resource and infrastructure if it is “establish its position as a regional centre of excellence in clinical trials or interventions against HIV and related infections.”

He mentioned the development of future leaders in scientific research should remain a top priority for MITU and a successful capacity building programme needs to be developed as soon as possible to support this goal. The unit should aim to develop an effective critical mass of able Tanzanians and East African Scientists who can increasingly play a reading role in the formulation and conduct of clinical trials and other major research studies,” he said in his speech.

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More efforts required in rural areas!

Interventions programmes on HIV/AIDS in the country must direct more efforts to rural areas where people are still bogged down by traditional cultural systems regarding marriages, lack of awareness on HIV/AIDS, poverty and related aspects, say rural activists.

Speaking to AIDS WEEK recently at Kabuku village, Handeni district, one of the activists, Samson Katendele, said efforts to minimize infection rate and to mitigate impact of HIV/AIDS were hampered by continued practice of traditional sexual and marriage practices in the area.

“Polygamy is one of the causes for increased rate of infection of HIV in this village, men do not see any problem marrying a second or a third wife, or to release their daughters to get married to older men who are already polygamous, some of them having multiple partners outside their legally married wives.”

Katendele further said poverty and lack of sustained means for generating income have turned women into sex/marriage slaves ‘for their see getting attached to men as the only recourse to life. Most women are house wives who have no means for generating their own income. They depend on men.” Adding: “most of the women are both ignorant and disempowered that they cannot resist sex without protection.”

Another HIV/AIDS activists, Albert Jilala, said that poverty in the area was also cause by people’s laziness for most of them do not want to work despite of living on very fertile lands. He said in some hamlets the World Vision organization had introduced horticulture activities as part of efforts to improve the income of the women and men in those areas.

“However, lack of starting capital for procuring fertilizer and other inputs is yet another problem facing the villagers.

“They still use hand hoes which makes it difficult to sustain the projects or ensure higher yields,” Jilala said.

Asked if younger girls were involved in the project Jilala said they were not, for in most cases those who have already reached puberty by the time of completing their primary education were already married off, and go to their husbands soon after they graduate.

The culture, he said, did not at all impart on the younger generation a higher achiever attitude which would help to make girls to see life beyond marriage and engagement in teenage sex as means to get money from men; “marriage, among the people in this area, is treated as amore important agenda than any other thing concerning a young person’s life, particularly for girls. Source: AIDS WEEK, Kabuku, Handeni
UKIMWI ututubakizia walimu wetu?

Takwimu za hivi karibu zinayosha kwamba kuna zaidi ya walimu 12,000 wanaishi na virusi vya UKIMWI. Hii ni sawa na asilimia 5 ya watu wote walio na virusi vya UKIMWI. Asilimia hii ni kubwa hasa ukizingatia kwamba tayari tuna uhaba mhubwa sana wa walimu nchini.

Aidha, walimu ndio watu tunaowatugea kuwa mfano katika maadili kwa wanafunzini. Kwa kuzingatia unyeti wa taaluma hii, hali hii inatishia sana maendeleo ya ubora wa elimu. Hii inayopatikana na utafiti uliotokana na utafiti uliotokana na utafiti uliotokana na utafiti.

Mara nyingi tunapopewa maslahi za utumiaji waUFM la kwa fa Robbie, kama hii inayotaka pesa za tatu za kujinga katika maadili. Hii inayopatikana na utafiti uliotokana na utafiti uliotokana na utafiti.

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The Kaiser Family Foundation and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) have issued a new report on 2008 funding for global AIDS efforts from the Group of Eight nations, European Commission (EC) and other donor governments.

The latest annual report shows that overall commitments in AIDS funding from the developed world totaled US$8.7 billion in 2008, up from US$6.6 billion the previous year. Disbursements, which reflect actual resources made available in a given year and therefore provide a better measure of resource availability, rose even more rapidly, up 56 percent to reach US$7.7 billion in 2008.

Disbursements from the United States totaled US$4 billion in 2008, more than half of all disbursements and more than any other single country.

The United Kingdom was the second largest donor, followed by the Netherlands, France, Germany, Norway and Sweden. Financing a sufficient and sustained response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in low- and middle-income countries has emerged as one of the world’s greatest health and development challenges.

International assistance from donor governments, through bilateral aid and contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, as well as other financing channels, is a critical part of the response. Importantly, while the report provides the latest data available on donor funding, it reflects budgets largely set in place before the acceleration of the current global economic crisis, which may create new challenges to future funding.

• Between 2002 and 2008, commitments and disbursements from developed nations each increased by more than five-fold.
• In 2008, donor governments disbursed US$5.7 billion bilaterally and earmarked funds for HIV through multilateral organizations, as well as an additional US$1.7 billion to combat HIV through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and US$265 million to UNITAID.
• When HIV/AIDS disbursements are measured as a share of each nation’s gross domestic product, the Netherlands ranks first, followed by the United Kingdom, Ireland, and the United States.

Give priority to contraceptives - Govt told

The government of Tanzania should commit enough funds to family planning budget lines for increased contraceptive use and ultimately improve the quality of life and pace of development.

The government reduced budget for family planning activities from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare from 7.7 billion shillings in 2004/05 budget to 3.5 billion shillings in 2008/09. Speaking to journalists in Nairobi, Kenya recently, at a workshop conducted by Population Reference Bureau, Arthur Jason from UMATI, a family planning NGO in Tanzania said adequate funding for family planning supplies is the key in reducing maternal deaths in Tanzania.

The two-day workshop of journalists which was conducted at Holiday Inn Hotel drew 20 participants from Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda. Jason said that increase of contraceptives budget lines in the ministry of health could save 18,688 maternal deaths and 495 child deaths in Tanzania by the year 2015.

A Tanzania case study conducted by Population Action International in June this year showed that only 8.3 per cent of women without education use a modern method of contraceptives compared 25.7 per cent who complete primary education.

This rate increases to 38.2 per cent among women who have an education at secondary level or higher. Women in urban areas are twice as likely as women in rural areas to use a modern method of contraceptives.

The study showed that women living in rural areas have a total fertility rate (TFR) of 6.5, almost twice that of women in urban areas.

Tanzania’s maternal mortality ratio is very high at 950 deaths per 100,000 lives.

The lifetime risk of maternal death is 1 in 24. According to Population Action International Tanzania is included in group of 26 countries in the highest risk category for women’s sexual and reproductive health.

Tanzania like other countries in East African countries in the late 1990s received less external funding for family planning products and services declined with priority going to HIV/AIDS.

SOURCE: AIDS WEEK
There is an old adage that goes by: “old habits die hard”. This was evident when a leader of the African Immigrant Community settled in Lewiston City in the US, Said Mohamud confirmed that his Somali community still embrace Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). “The old generation here still believe FGM is part of women’s beauty,” he told a group of visiting Tanzanian journalists. But said they were unable to perform the ritual to Somali girls because the US government has criminalized the practice.

Lewiston city in the US-North East coast hosts about 15,000 African immigrants out of which 95% are Somali refugees relocated in the city in 2001 due to the endless civil war in their country. Mohumud, former lecturer at the Mogadishu University said many would prefer to return home to perform FGM if it was not for the unrest due to civil war. He said if they could afford they could even go to peaceful neighboring countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda to perform the ritual if they were to afford travel costs. Lewiston City Mayor, Laurent Gilbert says due to language barriers and lack of professionalism among majority Somalis still live on handouts or earn little from small businesses they operate.

World Health Organization (WHO), statistics show that about 100 to 140 million girls and women worldwide are currently living with the consequences of FGM.

FGM involves partial or removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Some of the effects of FGM include pain during sexual intercourse, chronic infections, infertility, problems during pregnancy and may lead to death due to complication during child birth.

FGM increases the risk of HIV infection and other communicable diseases often due to use of unsterilized cutting equipment. In Africa about 3 million girls are at risk of FGM annually. In many African communities FGM is considered to be cultural transition from childhood to adulthood. But, Mohamud is worried about the future of the young Somalis. “Raising multicultural children is a challenge. We have cases where young people raise against us in the name of infringements of their rights.

Mohamud says, even after settling in the USA nearly a decade now, the old generation still embraced the African way of living. In Tanzania FGM is criminalized for the under 18 years, however, efforts are being done by human rights organizations to review the law.

The group of nine Tanzanian journalists are currently at the State University of Maine (UMaine) in the USA for a one-month cultural exchange programme funded by USAID.

SOURCE: MONICA LUWONDO currently in the USA.

AIDS WEEK reporter, Monica Luwondo chats with a group of Somali men in the street of Lewistone, recently.

(Picture by Khalfan Saidi)