FOUR CHILDREN DEAD DUE TO SHORTAGE OF DRUGS IN THE AREA

PADER BATTLES MEASLES, NODDING DISEASE CRISIS

By Johnisani Ocakacon

A shortage of essential medicines and a fresh measles outbreak have claimed the lives of four children in Pader district, sparking renewed calls for urgent government intervention. Health officials have so far confirmed 14 new measles cases in the area.

Two children suffering from nodding syndrome died in Angagura sub-county last week, while measles claimed two more lives in Puranga and Angagura sub-counties.

Community members say the deaths could have been prevented if drugs were consistently available at health facilities.

Miriam Amito, a resident of Angagura Central village in Kala-Awinya parish, said children are dying quietly in villages because they have not received nodding syndrome medication since last year.

She said the drugs must be taken regularly for patients to survive.

"Whenever we come for drugs at the health centre, we are told there are no drugs.

"Parents in this area have lost many children who are dying of nodding syndrome due to shortage of drugs in health facilities. This community needs urgent support from the Government," Amito said.

She added that within just two days, two children died and were buried, while other deaths go unreported because parents are helpless.

"Many of us parents can't afford to buy these drugs because they are expensive in private clinics. I request the Government to send drugs and rescue the lives of children with nodding syndrome," she said.

Abalo, a resident of Odeng A in Angagura sub-county, sitting with her son suffering with nodding syndrome in Pader district

Margaret Abalo, a mother of two both affected by nodding syndrome, described the daily struggle of caring for them without medication and adequate food.

"I am struggling to take care of these children without drugs because whenever we go to get their medication, we are told there are no drugs," Abalo said.

George Alem, 63, of Lacede village in Burlobo parish, who has three affected children, said climate change has worsened their situation after poor harvests in the second season.

"During this dry season, people are burning bushes. Some of these children are killed by wildfires because they cannot escape, while others drown when they go swimming in rivers with able-bodied children," Alem said.

He called on the Government to establish a rehabilitation centre for affected children.

Fredrick Stephen Okello, the LC3 chairperson of Angagura sub-county, confirmed the deaths and said the situation is dire.

"This week alone, we had two deaths. We need immediate government intervention," Okello said.

Samson Ocaya, the nodding syndrome focal person and in-charge of Angagura Health Centre III, said the facility serves more than 12,000 people and that Pader district has about 525 children suffering from nodding syndrome.

"We have run out of nodding syndrome drugs in health centres," Ocaya said, noting that patients sometimes receive medication for only two weeks, which does not complete treatment cycles.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Two children suffering from nodding syndrome died in Angagura sub-county last week, while measles claimed two more lives in Puranga and Angagura sub-counties.

Pader district health officer Dr Benson Oyoo said two children had died from measles and 14 cases have been recorded.

"This measles outbreak has also affected Angagura, which lies along the Gulu-Kitgum highway with heavy traveller traffic," Oyoo said, adding that mass immunisation will begin in homes and schools when first term opens next week.