

## HOIMA

By Wilson Asiimwe

Civil society organisations (CSOs) supporting children with Down syndrome in Bunyoro sub-region have raised concern over inadequate funding in schools and health facilities, which they say continues to limit proper care and inclusion of affected children.

Christopher Emanzi, the project co-ordinator at Rowan's Down Syndrome Awareness Centre in Kanenankumba, Hoima city, said the funding gaps have negatively affected the implementation of inclusive education policies in most schools. He made the remarks on Saturday while meeting parents of children living with Down syndrome.

Emanzi said in several health facilities across the sub-region, health workers fail to diagnose Down syndrome at birth.

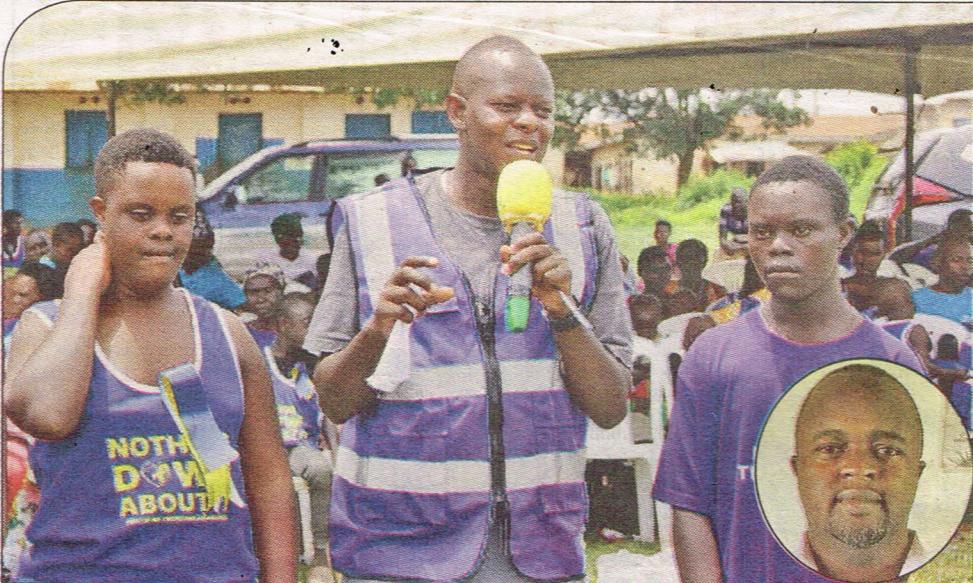
He noted that there was a need to provide more information and training to health workers, especially at the antenatal and neonatal stages to improve early diagnosis and intervention.

"We recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the districts of Hoima, Kikuube, Bulisa, Masindi and Hoima city and we always meet and engage communities to raise awareness about Down syndrome and share experiences," Emanzi said.

He revealed that the centre

# CSOs seek more funding to tackle Down syndrome

PHOTO BY WILSON ASIIMWE



Atwebembire (centre) speaking during a meeting with parents of children living with Down syndrome in Hoima city recently. Inset is Emanzi

has so far registered over 130 children with Down syndrome.

However, he expressed concern that most of these children are not enrolled in school, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive education.

"Many families are grappling with children suffering from Down syndrome. We have been encouraging them

to bring the children for therapies, especially speech therapy," he said.

The project co-ordinator appealed to parents to ensure that children living with Down syndrome are enrolled in schools and access medication like any other children at home. He also urged district authorities to deliberately include children with Down

syndrome in their budgets.

## WHAT OTHERS SAY

Noeline Kugonza, a resident of Businsi in Hoima East division, advised parents against isolating children with Down syndrome, saying they deserve the same love and care as other children.

Kugonza, whose child was born with heart complications

## MANY CASES UNNOTICED

According to a 2022 research report by Makerere University, Uganda has a high number of people living with Down syndrome, but records relatively low official figures because many cases go unnoticed.

The report attributes this to factors including stigma, poor screening and discrimination in communities.

In Uganda, research by the Down Syndrome Association of Uganda (DOSAU) shows that there are 25,409 registered people with Down syndrome.

DOSAU further notes that unemployment among people with Down syndrome has not received adequate government attention.

and later supported to receive treatment in India, encouraged parents to love, care for and support children with Down syndrome.

"Families and carers need

relevant information regarding health and nutrition that will empower them to face and handle the health challenges that come with Down syndrome," Kugonza said.

Martin Atwebembire, a public health co-ordinator, advised parents to protect children with Down syndrome from potential sexual exploitation.

He said girls have a 50% chance of getting pregnant if exposed, while boys have a 35% chance of impregnating girls, calling for close supervision and protection at home.

The public health co-ordinator added that they have been supporting people with Down syndrome, families and caretakers with relevant information on health and nutrition to help them manage the condition effectively.

He said children with Down syndrome commonly present physical characteristics such as a short, broad head, short neck, flat nose, slanting eyes, extra skin folds on the eyes, an open mouth with a protruding tongue and small ears.

## FACTS ABOUT DOWN SYNDROME

Down syndrome is caused by an error in cell division during the early development of the fetus. However, some parents have a higher risk of having children with the condition. Women over 35 years old and men over 55 years old are more likely to have a child with Down syndrome. Parents who already have a child with Down syndrome are also at higher risk.