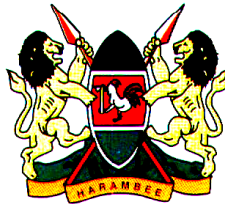


REPUBLIC OF KENYA



THARAKA NITHI COUNTY GOVERNMENT

A SPEECH BY THARAKA NITHI COUNTY FIRST LADY, HER EXCELLENCY LUCY MBAE DURING THE PRESENTATION OF SANITARY TOWELS AND SHOES TO ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE (OVCs) AT KAJIUNDUTHI PUBLIC GROUNDS ON 4TH JULY 2014.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen present,

Good Morning, It is my utmost pleasure to be with you this day as we come together in aid of our young children of Tharaka Nithi County.

I am happy to be part of this occasion aimed at assisting our young girls and boys, in particular the orphans and vulnerable children whose challenges go way deeper than children who have parents' support to help them pass through their day to day challenges.

It is very encouraging when the community embraces these children to make them feel part of it and grow to be great men and women who can make positive changes to the society.

Because of this cause, I started the sanitary towels initiative in our county aimed at assisting our struggling children during this delicate phase in their lives. It is unfortunate that at this time and age in Kenya, our girls continue to suffer due to lack of proper menstrual hygiene.

We can well note that as hard as it is for our young girls, it is much worse for the Orphans and the Vulnerable Children who lack parental care and affection which is needed most during this critical phase in their lives.

The issue of improper menstrual hygiene in Kenya is not new but thankfully Kenyans have continued to be equally informed and aware of this issue which creates a great alleyway to curbing the issue.

On May 28th this year, we celebrated the World Menstrual Hygiene Day, a very important occasion regarding menstrual health and sanitation. I hope the entire community and especially the education fraternity will observe this day with utmost importance and passion annually.

This day was marked for the first time in the world and in our nation where Tharaka Nithi became the first county to host the celebration. This should be

taken with a lot of weight to show that our county leads in prevention of more suffering for our girls during their monthly periods.

Last year, Kenyans were left in utter disbelief when a local TV station aired a story “Period of Shame” on how young girls in Marigat, Baringo County used goat skins, chicken feathers, leaves and even soil during their periods for lack of sanitary towels in attempt to remain dry and clean. Some girls dig a hole and sit on it throughout the period while others cut pieces of blankets and clothing.

This means that they skip schools and remain at home sitted on the hole to avoid soiling their clothes at school and embarrassing themselves.

A studies estimates that one in 10 African adolescent girls in remote areas misses school during their menses while some eventually drop out because of menstruation related issues. In Kenya a girl misses 3-5 days of school every

month during their monthly periods which means in a month she loses 13 learning days equivalent to two weeks of learning in every school term.

In an academic year (nine months) a girl loses 39 learning days equivalent to six weeks of learning time. A girl in primary school between class 6 and 8 loses 18 learning weeks out of 108 weeks while within the four years of high school a girl can lose 156 learning days equivalent to almost 24 weeks out of 144 weeks of learning in high school.

This we must all agree will adversely affect the education of the girl child because she cannot even interact with their fellow pupils and teachers due to lack of confidence caused by soiled uniforms.

As Kenyans we need to accept that this is a disaster on its own because in the end we are left with frustrated young girls due to continuous ridicules. They eventually fail in their exams; others drop out of school and get absorbed into

the same community that has been unfair to them. In the end what we have are frustrated women, which are a turn in the wrong direction for our county and the entire country at large.

This also negates the achievement of Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3: (*Achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality and empowering women*) and the realization of Kenya Vision 2030.

This has been challenged by lack of awareness and openness in talking about the issue where the community remains silent over what the girls go through. The community terms it as shameful and much more a taboo to talk about it openly.

The advantage now is we have county governments in place and the leaders are closer to the girls more than ever and this means rapid identification of the areas where our girls are suffering and immediately going into their aid.

It is in this line that we saw the need to have this event today which is part of a programme that has been running from early this year to see our girls in Tharaka Nithi County gain access to the sanitary towels and help them grow to be confident women ready to take on the world.

I urge all the women to join us in breaking the silence by preaching this gospel and assist in saving our girls from going through these challenges yet there is something we can do. Let us not wait for the media to air to the world sad stories of our girls while we continue enjoying life and boasting of personal growth.

Let us encourage more of such events through supporting our schools in development and advocacy associations, youth and women groups etc. As we continue with these projects and campaigns, let us not forget there is also need to provide information to girls about their bodies, menstruation itself and their general reproductive system.

Recent research in our county reveal that there is none or limited knowledge about the biological process of menstruation among girls and women living in some remote areas. Many women and adolescent girls in Kenya have limited knowledge about their bodies, especially in relation to menstruation and sexual and reproductive health.

According to Forum for African Women Educationalists-Kenya chapter(Fawek), a majority of adolescent girls in Kenya suffer through premature pregnancy, HIV/Aids and sexually transmitted infections, female genital

mutilation, forced marriages, rape and sexual harassment due to lack of information and services for healthy sexuality and reproduction.

As one Faye Wattleton said “Reproductive freedom is critical to a whole range of issues. If we can’t take charge of this most personal aspect of our lives, we can’t take care of anything. It should not be seen as a privilege or as a benefit, but a fundamental human right.” Let us talk to our girls and help them understand this is how God created us and it is very normal and okay to talk about it

As I conclude let us give more attention to the OVCs who are faced with the challenge of access to basic needs let alone the sanitary towels. Shelter, food, health education among others is what they yearn in their lives and as community we need to take up the responsibility of these children who now belong to us after loss of parents or able guardians.

A famous quote by Mother Teresa says “If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one. Let that one child who you in your village needs be your responsibility. Treat them as you treat or would treat your own.

Finally I would like to say that our county is n great support of our Excellency the First Lady Margaret Kenyatta on the BEYOND ZERO Campaign. Plans are underway for our very own county BEYOND ZERO campaign marathon to create awareness on maternal health care.

As our patron the first Lady leads we need to facilitate the County engagement which will see prevention of maternal death and risks through provision of mobile clinics for our women.

We are also going to encourage women's rights movement, County ownership, Feedback and accountability all that aimed at educating the community and drumming support to saving lives.

Finally I want to thank the Young Women Association(YMCA(led by their Manager Fridah Gakii in conjunction with Aphia Plus for their overwhelming support in assisting the girl Child. We will continue working with various partners to improve the lives of our people in Tharaka Nithi.

Thank you and God bless you

Her Excellency Mrs. Lucy Mbae.