

Merck Foundation Discuss Fertility Capacity Building with African Ministers At FIGO

Merck Foundation engages policymakers to define interventions to improve access to regulated, cost-effective Fertility Care in Africa and Developing Countries

DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, April 16, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Merck Foundation](http://MerckFoundation.com), the philanthropic arm of Merck KGaA, Germany, in partnership with the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), conducted 'Merck More Than a Mother' panel at their Regional conference 2018, in Dubai.

Dr. Rasha Kelej, CEO of Merck Foundation stated during the panel discussion. "Through 'Merck More than a Mother,' we want to bring the healthcare providers, policy makers, academia, women leaders, media, and artists together to define the interventions to break the infertility stigma around women and to build fertility care capacity in Africa and developing countries."

She further emphasized, "Merck Foundation is dedicated to empowering women who suffer discrimination and violence due to their inability to bring children, by creating the cultural shift to break the infertility stigma at all levels, not only in Africa, but in Asia, Latin America and everywhere it is needed."

"The high-level panel discussion included; Hon. Sarah Opendi, Minister of state of Health, Uganda, Hon. Zuliatu Cooper, Minister of Health and Sanitation, Sierra Leone, Hon. Margret Mensah-Williams, Chairman of National Council of Namibia, Hon. Dr. Chitalu Chilufya, Minister of Health, Zambia, and



Hon. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council, Namibia, Dr. Rasha Kelej, CEO Merck Foundation, Hon. Sarah Achieng Opendi, Minister of State of Health, Uganda and Hon. Zuliatu Cooper, Minister of Health&Sanitation, Sierra Leone



Hon. Cooper, Minister of Health&Sanitation, Sierra Leone, Hon. Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council, Namibia, Dr. Rasha Kelej, CEO Merck Foundation, Hon. Sarah Opendi, Minister of Health, Uganda & Hon. Chitalu Chilufya, Minister of Health, Zambia

the CEO OF Merck Foundation, Dr. Rasha Kelej.

Hon. Dr. Chitalu Chilufya, Minister of Health of Zambia, emphasized, “Infertility is one of the major health problems in Zambia, and it is not only affecting the physical health but also the mental well-being and social status, of childless women. These women often become invisible to the society, and many times they do not want to come in open to seek help because of the social stigma associated with infertility. Together with Merck Foundation, we want to remove the stigma associated with it by creating a cultural shift and building cost-effective fertility care in Zambia.”

During the panel discussion Hon. Margret Mensah-Williams, Chairman of National Council of Namibia, stressed, “ Infertility is profoundly prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, which is said to have an “infertility belt” wrapped around its center, the infertility rate is much higher in southern Africa. Particularly in Namibia infertility prevalence rates for some ethnic groups is as high as 32 percent [1], or one-third of all couples attempting to conceive, which is why initiatives like ‘Merck More than a Mother’ are significant for Namibia and we are glad to partner with Merck Foundation for this initiative.”

Hon Zuliatu Cooper, Minister of Health of Sierra Leone emphasized,” Merck Foundation is making history my country, they have trained the first two fertility specialists in Sierra Leone. For the first time, the infertile couple will be treated in their homeland. We still need to build the first IVF center to be able to manage complicated cases though.”

Hon. Sarah Opendi, Minister of State of Health, Uganda said, “The journey that Merck Foundation has started is a very special journey that has touched the lives of women who have been forgotten in the communities. It has touched not only women but also the lives of men who have been mistreating their women thinking that infertility is an issue of women, not know that 50% infertility is due to the malefactor. I want to thank Merck Foundation for thinking about these women.”

About ‘Merck More Than a Mother’ campaign;

In many Cultures, childless women suffer discrimination, stigma, and ostracism. Their inability to have children results in great isolation, disinheritance, and assaults. “Merck More Than a Mother” empowers such women through the access to information, health, change of mindsets and economic empowerment.

Merck Foundation provided for more than 50 candidates, three months to six months clinical and practical training for fertility specialists and embryologists in more than 17 countries across Africa and Asia.

Merck Foundation is making history in many African countries where they never had fertility specialists or specialized clinics before ‘Merck More Than a Mother’ intervention, to train the first



Hon. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council, Republic of Namibia, Dr. Rasha Kelej, CEO Merck Foundation and Hon. Sarah Achieng Opendi, Minister of State of Health, Republic of Uganda

fertility specialists such as; in Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Gambia, Niger, Chad, and Guinea.

Merck Foundation plan supported the establishment of the first public IVF in Ethiopia through providing the clinical and practical training necessary for their staff. Merck Foundation also plans to support the establishment of the first public IVF in Tanzania soon.

Over 1,200 infertile women in Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, CAR, Ethiopia, Liberia, Tanzania, Niger, The Gambia and Cote D'Ivoire who can no longer be treated have been empowered socially and economically to lead independent and happier lives through "Empowering Berna."

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