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Kenya commits to deworm children

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NAIROBI, Kenya, Mar 21 - Prime Minister Raila Odinga on Friday said that the government was committed to deworm school children, terming it as an effective health intervention in improving students' participation in schools.

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Speaking when he met Deworm the World Program Head Prof Michael Kremer, Mr Odinga said that worms were as responsible for absenteeism in schools as is cost, distance and lack of facilities.

“Worms undermine the health of children and affect their ability to learn, we are committed to the programme of deworming children, we still need more help to fight worms in children,” he said.

He said millions of children were chronically infected with intestinal worms.

The parasites, he said are so widespread that some societies do not recognise infection as a medical problem.

Prof Kremer noted that the Deworm The World Program was investing in technologies for purifying water collection points.

With government’s aim to reach out to three million children this year, he said the programmes would even realise a further reduction in school absenteeism.

“Evaluation done has proved that our programmes have reduced absence from schools by 25 percent. Kenya is a global leader in fighting worms and I hope other African countries will follow this,” he said.

In Kenya, an earlier primary school deworming programme was implemented by International Child Support in a district with high worm infection rates.

Seventy five primary schools with a total enrolment of 30,000 pupils aged 6-18 years participated in the programme.

The study found that deworming increased school participation by at least seven percent cutting absenteeism by a quarter.

It further showed that deworming was six times cheaper than providing meals and costs 20 times less than giving uniforms and increased school participation by 5.8 percent.

Last month Mr Odinga told the 2009 World Economic Forum in Switzerland that the government would invest Sh70 million in the deworming programme, which will target children in high prone areas of the country.

According to Deworm the World, over 400 million school age children worldwide are infected with parasitic worms.

The World Health Organisation targets to deworm 75 percent of children at risk by 2010.

By 2006 only 10 percent of the children were treated.

Worms in children cause listlessness, diarrhoea, abdominal pain and anaemia.

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