

COVER STORY

'Say NO to infertility stigma'

Dr Rasha Kelej the CEO of Merck Foundation made it to the list of 100 most influential Africans 2019 by New African Magazine for empowering many women through Merck More Than a Mother campaign. In an interview with **The Nation Magazine**, **Dr Rasha Kelej** explains their approach and plans going forward.

Dr Rasha Kelej, please tell us how do you feel to be listed amongst the 100 most influential Africans?

I am very proud to be listed among the 100 most Influential Africans in 2019. This recognition is very important for me and for Merck foundation as it acknowledges my efforts, my team's efforts through our Merck More Than a Mother and acknowledges it as a huge Movement. It is a historic campaign. We succeeded to mobilize and work closely with African First Ladies and Ministries of Health, Gender, Information and Education, media, Art, fashion, community leaders and scientists to empower infertile women through information, health and change of mindset.

We also worked with local singers, film-makers, media partners and fashion designers to be able to raise awareness to break the stigma of infertility. Through these initiatives we wish to sensitize our communities that Women are more than Just Mothers and Men are more than Just Fathers. Also, it takes both a man and a woman

to have a child.

We have produced and launched more than 20 songs with famous singers from Burundi, Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Zambia, Gambia to raise awareness about male infertility and to break the Stigma around Infertility in Africa. Moreover, it is also an honour for us to have the First Lady of Burundi, H. E. First Lady of Burundi and The President of Liberia, H.E. George Weah do their own songs for our campaign. This shows their commitment towards our campaign.

We also launched children story in African countries. The story has been localized and launched in the elementary level school of many African Countries with message from their respective First Lady, as ambassadors of Merck more than a Mother and special message from me in English, French and Portuguese. And local names and narratives have been adapted for each country.

Merck Foundation's children storybook emphasizes on strong family values of love and respect from young age which will reflect on eliminating the stigma of infertility and resulted domestic violence in the future.

Tell us about the work you have been doing in Rwanda?

Merck Foundation in partnership with Rwanda Ministry of Health has provided the support to establish the first public IVF Center in the Military Hospital through providing 5 candidates with Embryology and clinical

