

**CHANGE TACTICS**

*Museveni described ministry officials as lazy and told them to focus on eliminating the female anopheles mosquito*

By Nicholas Wassaja

Ahead of his visit to Uganda in 2015, Pope Francis joked that he was more worried about mosquitoes that cause malaria than terrorist threats.

Yesterday, President Yoweri Museveni tasked Uganda's top health ministry officials and experts with explaining why mosquitoes have not been eliminated and continue being a menace in the country. Malaria is responsible for the death of 15 people every day in the country.

Museveni was officiating at the launch of the Mass Action Against Malaria (MAAM) and the Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Malaria (UPFM) campaign with the theme, "A malaria-free Uganda starts with me."

**Eliminate them**

Museveni, who described the health ministry officials as lazy, said it was illogical to continue fighting malaria instead of focusing on eliminating the anopheles mosquito that transmits the disease.

"The two living organisms, which are the insect (mosquito) that transmits and the protozoa plasmodium that actually causes malaria are not like the other enemies because these ones, you can kill. If they can be killed, then why have a malaria control programme instead of elimination?" Museveni asked.

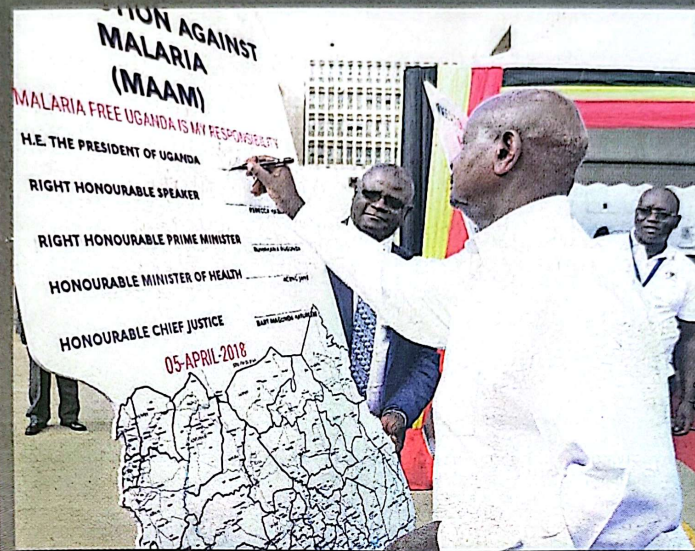
"If we have eliminated 13 killer diseases so far, through putting in place strong preventive measures such as vaccination, then why not the mosquitoes? The problem is laziness, especially by the health ministry officials because efforts to eliminate them are a repeated process."

MAAM is a new government campaign, geared towards sustaining gains made in reducing malaria deaths by reaching out to every household countywide with appropriate prevention and control interventions. Uganda ranks sixth with the highest deaths from malaria in Africa.

The President said besides using treated mosquito nets and indoor spraying, outdoor spraying is another method of prevention whose implementation has stalled because of belief that it would affect the food chain.

"If we have indoor residual spraying that

# Museveni pins health experts over malaria



President Yoweri Museveni signs a placard at the launch of the Mass Action Against Malaria campaign at Parliament yesterday. The President said health officials should focus on eliminating mosquitoes. Photo by Miriam Namutebi

lasts for about six months, then why not follow the mosquito to the bush and spray it from there," Museveni asked before calling on the health minister, Dr Ruth Aceng, to explain.

"We wanted to use Dichloro Diphenyl Trichloroethane (DDT), but there was controversy that it persisted and became concentrated in the food chain, including in fish and animals. We investigated and found that the claims were false, but the controversy never died," Aceng said.

She, however, added that they were currently

concentrating on larvicide to target the life cycle of the mosquitoes and indoor residual spraying. The minister called Dr Myers Lugemwa from the National Malaria Control Programme to expound on the matter.

**Indoor spraying**

Lugemwa told the President that they should concentrate on indoor spraying because the anopheles mosquito which spreads malaria lives inside houses and only lays eggs outside the house. He said the other mosquitoes in

**COST OF SPRAYING**

*The President said the sh350b needed for indoor spraying is less than what Uganda spends (sh400b) on Malaria treatment*

areas such as swamps cause diseases like yellow fever and river elephantiasis.

Not satisfied with the explanation, Museveni continued firing questions at the minister and Lugemwa, demanding to know why the indoor residual spraying had not been carried out countrywide.

Aceng then said the cost would be prohibitive for such an exercise. "When we calculated, we found that we would need sh350b to carry out the indoor spraying of every household in the country."

However, the President shot down her argument, saying sh350b is less than what Uganda spends (sh400b) on malaria treatment.

*"If we have eliminated 13 killer diseases through strong preventive measures, why not the mosquitoes?" Museveni*

Museveni expressed support for the proposal for a presidential malaria fund and pledged the Government would top up on what the private sector contributes to the special envelope. However, he warned the resources should only be used in areas that are underfunded such as scientific research and innovations to fight malaria.

Earlier, the Deputy Speaker, Jacob Oulanyah, said the focus of the malaria campaign should be elimination of the mosquitoes.

The Malaria No More Ambassador, Charlie Webster, narrated how she almost died in Brazil from malaria. Webster's movie on malaria that was broadcast in Uganda will be screened at a Commonwealth meeting in London next month.

During the function, several personalities including scientists were recognised for their contribution. They included Dr Louis Godfrey Mukwaya of Uganda Virus Research Institute. Mukwaya is globally recognised for mosquito research.