

EDITORIAL

Basic hygiene should be taught and given

Yesterday, this newspaper had a shocking headline titled, 'Ugandans die for being dirty, says Mulago boss'. Mulago National Referral Hospital's executive director Batera Byarugaba in an interview stated that many of the country's citizens are dying needlessly because they are dirty.

"Ugandans should prevent diseases than bringing them to the hospital," he said, "adding, 'they don't want to clean their homes... they are dirty... the way they eat. They just eat anything.' He went on to say that 70 per cent of those admitted to the hospital suffer from diseases caused by poor hygiene and unhealthy lifestyles.

While Prof Peter Waiswa, a lecturer at Makerere University School of Public Health, disagreed on whose shoulders the responsibility of keeping clean should fall, he generally

agreed that there is a crisis in the public health sector in the country and something needs to be done about it quickly. It is, of course, recommended that each family ought to look after themselves in terms of cleanliness and hygiene. In fact, children in primary schools are taught quite thoroughly the importance of hygiene and sanitation. However, it is hard for a man and his family to keep clean if they are not given the basics they need to do so.

Many people across the country use untreated water from natural sources such as lakes, rivers and springs for household chores. In some semi-urban areas as well as in some urban areas, there is hardly any running water. And when that water runs dry, they have to buy some from water traders selling it expensively and many times they cannot be sure

where the water came from.

Further more, many of the slum areas in Kampala and other towns no doubt, do not have proper toilets or pit-latrines. Residents throw their waste into channels, behind their neighbour's house or anywhere else they find convenient. Such basic matters of hygiene should be quickly addressed.

Prof Waiswa argues that it is the government's job to do so. "Public health has to be integrated in policy guidelines, education, leadership and enforcement," he says. And he is right. Where there is a festering problem, the government through the responsible arm, should find solutions to help the people.

It is absurd, for example, that even though Mulago hospital was split into two auxiliary hospitals, set up in different parts of the city, the budget remained the same! If the Ministry of Health would like to see a reduction in such preventable diseases, it should follow the wise saying that prevention is better than cure.

The issue:

Poor hygiene

Our view:

Where there is a festering problem, the government through the responsible arm, should find solutions to help the people. Besides, the Ministry of Health should follow the wise saying that prevention is better than cure.

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