

national budget framework paper for the 2018/2019 financial year for the education sector, the participants observed

Green Party. The participants from all walks of life, appearing for the first time in the chambers,

(Green Party) said: "The health sector is critical in the attainment of Uganda's Vision 2040 by producing a healthy

services and status generating activities. She said: "We are grateful but

Health centres weak in disease surveillance

By Agnes Nantambi

Public health experts have established that Uganda's health centres are weak in disease surveillance.

According to Dr Alex Ario, an epidemiologist and co-ordinator Uganda Public Health Programme, surveillance is one of the cornerstones for monitoring trends and diseases in the country and also detect alerts that help in eliminating outbreaks.

"This means disease outbreaks cannot easily be detected at a health centre within a certain location," Ario said.

"When you set up a disease surveillance system which is sensitive enough, it is supposed to alert you that the trend of a disease is going out of hand, meaning there is an outbreak," he said.

Speaking during the graduation of the 10 students who have been undergoing a two-year in-service training in Kampala, Ario stressed that the students had done a lot to reverse the situation.

"The fellows have analysed the public health service data and seen the weaknesses and addressed them. They have designed surveillance systems in the health centres and improved it, which has improved the entire surveillance system," he said.

The public health fellowship programme is a capacity building programme being implemented in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and Makerere University School of Public Health (MakSPH) and the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The \$10m (about sh36b) five-year

programme, is funded by the US government through the CDC and other partners to equip public health professionals with skills to manage public health challenges and become the next generation of public health leaders.

According to Riolexus, the fellows were enrolled on field epidemiology track, which is aimed at training Uganda's disease detectives in skills to effectively respond to and control disease outbreaks.

He explained that in areas where the fellows were, the surveillance systems were evaluated and made sure that they are improved to be sensitive enough to detect diseases early enough.

"They have responded to alerts at the ministry 24/7 through the public health emergency centre, which led to the ministry to score highly during the recent joint external evaluation," he said.

He revealed that the fellows are also responding to the disasters which are rampant due to the influx of refugees, saying rapid assessment is always done to establish whether there is a good surveillance system in place and what potential risks can cause an outbreak to occur.

"On top of everything, the programme was designed to advise the leadership of the ministry to adapt to the cost effective interventions.

"The fellows are now able to use economic analysis techniques to demonstrate that although outbreaks are very expensive, you can use simple control measures to avert them and save a lot of money," he said.

"Ever since the fellowship, over 60

outbreaks have been responded to like Marburg, hemorrhagic fever and anthrax which had never been detected," he said.

The CDC country director, Dr Lisa Nelson, applauded the team for sacrificing their time for two years with a lot of field trips, many sleepless nights, countless presentations, reports, abstracts and manuscripts.

"The HIV, Influenza, Ebola and Zika epidemics and pandemics during the past half century have taught us repeatedly that one country's communicable disease problem is every country's problem

"Early identification and prompt response to communicable disease outbreaks are key for effective and successful containment and control. Therefore developing a robust capacity for outbreak detection and control should remain a high priority for the entire global community, she suggested.

The acting Director General of Health Services, Dr Patrick Tumusime, expressed optimism that the grandaunds will be able to handle health problems.

"We have been having challenges of disease surveillance in refugee camps but such findings have helped us draft a plan to address them," he said.

The dean of MakSPH, Dr Rhoda Wanyenze, said the fellows have increased the number of highly trained epidemiologists to 20 who should join the pool of competent workforce to enhance disease detection and response in the country.

Prof. David Serwadda advised the graduands to exhibit high standards of professionalism.