

# Is there reason for us to celebrate World Health Day?



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The world over people are celebrating the World Health Day. The celebrations in Uganda took in Luwero. The main theme for the day was *Universal Health Coverage Everyone Everywhere*. As I think about the day, I ask myself, do we as Ugandans have a reason to celebrate? And the answer is, Yes and No. Yes, because several things have improved in Uganda over the years with regard to health service delivery. Access to health facilities has improved at least in terms of distance. Currently 83% of the population resides within 5km from a health facility. Several interventions that improve health are also being implemented in the country; thanks to the development partners who fund many of these initiatives. All these efforts have yielded some positive fruits giving us a reason to smile and celebrate on World Health Day. Access to antiretroviral drugs for HIV has greatly increased. Further improvements have been noted with regard to mortality. Maternal mortality has reduced from 524 women per 100,000 in 2000 to 336 per 100,000 while infant mortality has reduced from 85 per 1000 in 1995 to 44 per 1000 in 2016.

However it has been said, "even roses have thorns," and so we still have some thorns that prick us now and again. Although 83% of the population can access a health facility, drug stock-outs are still very common. In addition, other resources such as human resources and diagnostic services are also often inadequate. This forces the population to meet some of the cost of health care by seeking various kinds of private health care resulting in high-out-of-pocket expenditures, which increased from 36% in 2012/2013 to 40% in 2013/2014.

What actions do we need to take so that we can move more steadily towards achieving Universal health care? Three key areas need attention, in my view.

One, our Government needs to allocate more funding towards health. Allocation to the health sector over the years has steadily decreased from 8.9% of the national budget in 2010/2011 to 6.4% of the National budget in 2015/2016. Government funding is able to ensure that adequate infrastructure and resources exist for the delivery of health services. This responsibility should not be left to donors and

households who together meet about 80% of the country's total health expenditure.

Two, we need to reconfigure our service delivery system at all levels to ensure that we focus on prevention rather than curative care. The national health accounts showed that 72% of our total health expenditure was spent on providing curative care. Community awareness about the importance of preventive care needs to be strengthened by approaching delivery of health services through a more multi-sectoral approach. On a positive note, the new Community Health Extension worker strategy for the country is being structured to achieve this. Similarly financial allocations for service delivery, investments in health service delivery as well as health practitioners need to put more emphasis on prevention.

Three, it goes without saying that we need to invest more in our health system at all levels, we need to produce more health workers. We have only one doctor per 50,000 people. We should also ensure that we produce the right people for the right job by providing sufficient resources for the training schools and enforcing existing training regulation to ensure quality training of all cadres of health workers. As we produce these workers, we need to recall the old saying a "bad workman blames his tools" we need to ensure that adequate financial and non financial incentives and resources are available to health workers so as to enhance efficient performance. Amidst all the above we certainly should not forget the contribution of the private sector. We need to create an enabling environment for investment by the private sector in health so that we can exploit the potential that exists in this sector. You are probably saying but we know all these things we have them in our policies. Yes I agree with you! We need to hold our leaders accountable to ensure that we implement what is in our policies! But who will hold them accountable? Me and you! We all have a part to play. What will you do to hold your leader accountable?

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