

Health ministry defends budget cut

By Moses Mulondo

The Ministry of Health has defended the decision by government to cut the health budget. The state minister for health in charge of general duties, Sarah Opendi, attributed the reduction to the completion of projects for construction and rehabilitation of hospitals.

"Those projects for which government had borrowed money have ended. That is why the budget has reduced. But there has not been any reduction of the budget for operations," Opendi said.

According to the 2018/2019 budget framework paper, the budget for the health sector has been reduced from sh1.8 trillion allocated in the current financial year (2017/2018) to sh1.6 trillion for the next budget.

The reduction will cause the percentage allocation of the health sector budget to fall from 8.3% to 7.4% of the national budget.

The proposed budget also lacks allocation of money meant to increase salaries of doctors in response to the

strike they organised last year.

Opendi, however, clarified that before the budgeting process ends in May, adjustments will have been made to incorporate money needed to increase salaries of health workers.

Various stakeholders including the executive director of the National Planning Authority, Dr Joseph Muvawala, have raised concern over the meager budget for health centre IVs with an allocation of sh500,000 monthly.

Asked to clarify on whether each health centre is given only sh500,000 as its monthly budget, Opendi said more funding has been provided.

On what would be the key priorities for the sector in the next financial year, Opendi said, "our focus will be on addressing the communicable and non-communicable diseases. We shall sensitise the citizens on how to avoid them." Commenting on the budget for the sector, the shadow minister for health, Julius Ochen, said what government gives to health centre IVs is a mockery of the lives of Ugandans.