

alleged on Saturday from their
alleged hideout in Ayivu sub-
county, ending a one-month

Angucia, Josephine Angucia,
the West Nile regional Police
spokesperson, said.
Angucia said the suspects

will be charged
and aggravated
will be produc

Solar power rescues Busoga health centres

JINJA

By George Bitu

A technician observes the contents of a slide while using an electricity-powered microscope at Buwenge Health Centre IV in Jinja district.

He seems to take his time, carefully writing down his findings on a piece of paper, before proceeding to the next slide. This apparent confidence could have something to do with the reliability of the solar power being used.

Patrick Waluga, a clinical officer, narrates that the alternative power comes in handy after hydro-electric power supplier, Umeme, switched off power over an unpaid sh50m bill.

Across the district boundary in Luuka, the district chairman, Baker Luwano, discloses that Kiyunga Health Centre IV's power was also disconnected.

"Umeme demands sh16m from the health centre over an accumulated bill. We had an agreement last year that we pay sh3m per quarter to offset the debt, but the pact was not honoured," Luwano laments.

He says the district has now contracted a local firm to set up a solar power solution so as to save the lives of patients.

Dr James Waako, the medical superintendent of Iganga Hospital, explains that the health facility is grappling with a sh200m electricity bill.

"Umeme often cuts off power, but interventions from politicians help us out. Our equipment consumes a lot of power, so we need alternatives, such as solar," Waako says.

He adds that, already, the hospital has acquired solar-powered security lights and arrangements are underway to link other key departments, such as the maternity ward and the theatre.

Dr Aggrey Batesaaki, the Kamuli district health officer, observes that at Namwendwa Health Centre IV, the recent installation of solar power

enables the theatre to be operational 24 hours a day.

"Power from Umeme is unreliable in Kamuli as we often have blackouts lasting days. On average, 3,000 patients visit Namwendwa, of which 80 are expectant mothers," Batesaaki says.

Challenges

According to Kisitu Ndegeya, the officer in charge of Magada Health Centre III in Namutumba district, the facility is not linked to the national power grid.

"We lack electricity and the improvisation with solar is problematic. Every time it rains, it becomes unreliable," Ndegeya says.

Sarah Akello, an enrolled midwife, says handling deliveries at the labour suite at night is hectic without proper lighting as improvised candles give dim light.

Sarah Namakiika, a health worker at Sigulu Health Centre III on Sigulu islands in Namayingo district, says the solar system malfunctioned two years after installation.

"Nowadays, the cold storage that ensures that vaccines stay safe, is powered by gas. Whenever the cylinders run out of gas, the vaccines automatically run out of stock," Namakiika says.

Way forward

Luwano urges the Government to subsidise power for key installations, such as hospitals, to prevent disconnections in future.

Dr David Muwanguzi, the Iganga district health officer, believes that a reduction in electricity tariffs by 1.7% as announced by the electricity regulatory authority, is a step in the right direction.

"The provision of standby generators, as well as solar sets to revamped government hospitals, is a good move. These can equally help guard against unpredictable power supply," Muwanguzi observes.

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