

EDITORIAL

Govt should fix our ailing health system

The story, 'Midwives using torches to deliver mothers at Soroti health centre' in this paper's edition of Tuesday is very unfortunate. The story states that health workers and patient caretakers at Kamuda Health Centre III in Soroti District are struggling to attend to patients in the night following the breakdown of the facility's solar system. The health centre handles 28,000 patients and carries out 45 deliveries every month.

Sadly, what is happening in Kamuda Health Centre III is a microcosm of the general ailment of the health system in the country. Recently, the media reported that power distributor Umeme disconnected electricity supply to Tororo Regional Referral Hospital over an accumulated power bill of Shs292m. This left the 226-bed capacity facility in virtual darkness.

More worrying in both cases is that, medical workers can only effectively attend to patients during daytime. Worse still, they can only work on ailments that need no power supply. You do not have to be a patient in critical condition to feel the gravity of such a situation. It is abhorrent.

The Issue:

Health sector

Our view:

Government and other stakeholders must prioritise fixing the country's health system. Short of this, the country will remain stuck in a vicious cycle of poverty.

However, operating in darkness at night is not the only challenge at public health facilities in the country. Patients who visit government-run hospitals have often raised a myriad of complaints ranging from shortage of medicines, a few doctors to attend to them, lack of medical supplies, and congestion, among others. In the case of pregnant mothers, they have to carry maternity-related materials, including razor blades, cotton wool, gauze, plastic rolls, sheets, blankets, etc. This is unbelievable.

Equally concerned about the sorry state of public health services across the country are the doctors and other health workers. For instance, members of the Uganda Medical Association (UMA) on November 6 last year, staged a nationwide industrial action over low pay and poor working conditions. Part of their major grievances was government's failure to meet their demands for a review of the supply of medicines and other equipment in health centres.

One hoped that government listened to the cries of the health practitioners and would reverse the situation - that is until you read the Soroti health centre story, which reveals no change. It should be noted that unless government fixes the health sector challenges, talk of attaining middle income status by 2020 or achieving Vision 2040 will remain a pipe dream. This is because an ailing population can never be fully productive. And with no or limited, productivity, the country's economy cannot grow.

This is why government and other stakeholders must prioritise fixing the country's health system. Short of this, the country will remain stuck in a vicious cycle of poverty.

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