



MOSES TETUI > MULAGO

I feel like having another baby just so I have one of my children born at the maternal centre at Mulago National Referral Hospital, which is yet to be commissioned. The mighty walls and high raised pillars exude elegance and an infrastructure built for generations. The windows are cut to exact fits and in ample size to allow natural ventilation and lighting.

The coating – white, grey and orange – allows a visual of beauty and dominance. The landscaping and walkways are relaxing even just to look at – fit for the purpose, especially for those waiting on a newborn with thoughts of nothing can go wrong. I will be first on the queue when it is ready for interior viewing.

According to the government, the hospital will handle obstetric and gynaecological cases, with abilities to deal with reproductive system-related cancers. It will have newborn wards with intensive care units. It will also have a private wing. With a 450-bed capacity, the Mulago Women's Centre is shaping out not only to be Africa's biggest women-specialty facility, but also a dazzling beauty that every Ugandan should be proud of and strive to protect jealously. It is simply well done!

My office at the Makerere University school of Public Health overlooks this new hospital complex. Through my window, I have seen the structure raised from ground to several floors, initially generating rumbling noise of a construction site that often brought me headache. However, what has come out of this 'noise'

has made me believe that the noise was worth bearing. I no longer feel the headache now.

It must be the beauty my neighbour has become. I can only imagine how it will look just before commissioning. Indeed, sometimes I wish I would have just one more chance to enjoy the imaginary comfort of having to give birth at this facility or at least of fathering a child born here.

I really hope that in there will also be soft-spoken and caring nurses who will treat the mothers and babies with comfort and dignity. The thought of all this makes me want to quickly take on a new career – "a new government hospitals' tour guide." I can't imagine the pride I would feel taking you around this hospital. I swear I would protest if for some crazy reason, my employer decided to shift my office.

Uganda's health system has indeed evolved in many positive ways over the past three decades. A growing partnership with the private sector is one of such strides of growth. With the growth of the private sector, a few Ugandans have had the chance to enjoy a somewhat similar hospital environment.

I am talking of the likes of CURE children's hospital in Mbale Town, which by the way is just opposite my parents' home, that was my first beholding of a beautifully done and maintained hospital, its truly a place where health is recovered. Around Kampala, such private hospitals are springing up. And now with the

New maternal centre at Mulago hospital is a beauty, pride; please let it remain so



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upcoming Agha Khan Teaching Hospital, the sky is the only limit for us.

Nonetheless, these also have quality maintenance challenges and some of them are struggling just like a lot of our public hospitals.

One of the sights I hate in public hospitals is

patients lying around on floors in distress, exuding a message of hopelessness in a place that should be full of hope. As I sat at the window of my office, my mind couldn't stop bothering me with thoughts of the long running culture of poor maintenance of public health facilities.

Reality started to sink in fast regardless of how hard I fought it off. The million-dollar question is, how shall our maternal super centre be fortified from the likes of faulty equipment, broken walls and floors, leaking roofs, blocked toilets, drug and supplies stockouts, low staffing, blood and supplies shortages, limited funding, water and power cuts and the list is unending.

Should we privatise the centre? That will raise uncontrollable dust given the way it did when talks of Ugandans having to pay for the services here were leaked. But what should we do then, can we learn something from private hospitals?

As I end, personal integrity, an excellence attitude, servanthood and high level of discipline are needed if meaningful change is to take root within our health system.

These must be built on a back bone of a strong and inclusive management structure to provide high quality and responsive health services.

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