

# Health ministry officials, firms probed over abuse of sh464b project

By Simon Masaba

At least eight of the 35 newly built health facilities across the country are on the verge of collapse after developing multiple cracks in the foundations, floors, walls, walkways and ceilings.

Although contractors have tried to repair the cracks, the work is still shoddy, according to the Police.

The disturbing discovery was made in a preliminary investigation by the State House health monitoring unit on the state of health facilities across the country.

Uganda Health Systems Strengthening Project (UHMSSP) was conceived in 2008, after an assessment of the infrastructural needs of health units at different levels. Thereafter, the Government obtained a World Bank loan of \$125m (about sh464b) to implement it. However, the funds have reportedly been squandered.

Yesterday, sources said after the findings, State House ordered the Police's Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID) to probe the matter and bring culprits to book.

CID, headed by Assistant Inspector General of Police Grace Akullo, opened a general inquiry file on the state of the health centres, and teams were sent to various centres for verification.

CID spokesperson Vincent Ssekatte confirmed that there is an ongoing investigation of health facilities in the central, eastern and northern Uganda and several health ministry officials and contractors had been summoned for questioning.

According to sources, a total of 40 cases were opened, ranging from alleged abuse of office, embezzlement, causing financial loss, fraudulent false accounting and obtaining money by false pretence by officials of the Ministry of Health, consultants and

## CASES OPENED

■ A total of 40 cases have been opened, ranging from alleged abuse of office, embezzlement, causing financial loss, fraudulent false accounting and obtaining money by false pretence by health ministry officials, consultants and contractors during the implementation of the Uganda Health Service Systems Strengthening Project.

contractors during the implementation of the Uganda Health Service Systems Strengthening Project.

The main objective of the project was to enhance the



CID boss Grace Akullo

functionality of selected health facilities by providing and improving infrastructure for effective health service delivery.

The project covered 35

selected health facilities across the country. They comprised of one regional referral hospital, eight general hospitals and 26 health centre IVs.

The beneficiaries of the project were Moroto Regional Referral Hospital and Iganga, Kiryandongo, Anaka, Nakaseke, Moyo, Nebbi, Mityana and Entebbe general hospitals.

The health centres IV that were considered were Bwijanga in Masindi district, Budondo in Jinja, Ngoma and Kikamulo in Nakaseke district, Kiyunga in Luuka district, Bugongo in Iganga, Rubaale and Kitwe in Ntungamo, Nankoma in Bugiri, Buyinja in Namayingo, Mwizi in Mbarara, Aduku in Apac, Kiganda and Kassanda in Mubende, Pakwach health centre and Kyantungo and Mwera in Mityana.

Others were Ntenjeru-Kojja in Mukono, Kabuyanda in Isingiro, Aboke in Kole, Padibe in Lamwo, Atiak in Amuru, Obongi in Moyo and Buvuma,

Kibuku and Budaka health centres IV.

The Ministry of Health implemented the project and handled the procurement of both local and foreign construction companies.

The companies included Excel Construction Company, Prism Construction Company, Amugoli General Enterprises, China National Acro-Technology International Engineering Corporation (CATIC), China National Complete Plan Limited, Yanjian Uganda Company, Synohydro Corporation Limited and China Railway N0.5 Engineering Company.

Without divulging details, the health ministry's permanent secretary, Dr Diana Atwine, confirmed the ongoing investigations by the Police.

"It is true that there are some officials in the ministry under probe, but it is too early to discuss this, especially in the media," she said.