

**ESTHER
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Social services should be a given



The picture of the late singing soldier, Sgt Kifulugunyu, sprawled belly-up on a battered wooden wheelbarrow, being carted for medical help after he collapsed, touched a raw nerve. As a tax-paying people, Ugandans deserve to enjoy the basic social services free of charge. Some people think that is a blasphemous statement; that we are not worth good healthcare services, good education and other social welfare.

Because of that mentality, we travel abroad and see all these nice services, but continue to let our social services stagnate. This mentality keeps us cutting corners even in things that would benefit us, such as proper urban development.

We resist town planning efforts and end up living in corners that an ambulance cannot navigate to reach. Emergency services like fire engines would need to use catapults to put out fires in some of our so-called urban homes (and I am not talking about slums). When the pseudo-rich Ugandans buy their 50x100 plots, wall fences take priority over access roads. In the end, only a wheelbarrow can access some homes.

The volunteers who ferried Sgt. Kifulugunyu might have had nothing better to work with than the wooden cart. It may even be possible that

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there was no medic or medicine where they took him. Thus ended the life of a man who ‘fought’ for a better Uganda and then settled for the small nest he could feather for himself.

Doctors and medical interns have laid down their tools in a bid to get a pay raise, arguing that other people are enjoying themselves. We can accuse them of breaking their own Hippocratic Oath of preserving life at all costs, but we probably do not know half of what they go through.

Poor pay is just the starting point. When we talk of shortage of clinical supplies in health centres, big and small, we rarely envision the medical personnel who have the training to execute any procedure, but cannot go forward without the basic necessities. Take the example

of medics using phone torches to provide light during an operation; or when there are no gloves to be found, yet there is blood everywhere.

We have left it to the private sector and donors to spearhead the improvement of social services. We are satisfied to do car washes and Facebook campaigns to send a few people to foreign hospitals, while our systems never develop, even as we claim economic development.

Coincidentally, today, the annual Kampala marathon is taking place, with Ugandans running for charity. They have done this for the last 14 years; one year for water and sanitation in Karamoja; another year for sanitation in Kampala’s schools; this year for the health sector, specifically maternal services...and so on. Really, the basics. You would think that somebody up there would pick a leaf and take over the mantle.

That said, can the Government trust us to co-operate if it invests a lot in social services? Some of us use our government jobs to steal and feather our own private establishments to compete with the Government ones.

Most medics and teachers give only half of their time to their principal employer. If they get better pay, will they also concede to some restrictions on their moonlighting gigs?

I do hope so.