

Maternal deaths: We need realistic actions

On Friday, an MP died due to pregnancy-related complications. Hailat Kaudha Magumba, 31, became part of the grim statistics that define maternal mortality in this country. Various surveys put the figure at 16 deaths daily. The Iganga Woman MP succumbed to severe preeclampsia, which health professionals define as hypertensive disorders that complicate pregnancy.

The MP's death is a sad reminder of the vulnerability of pregnant mothers in this country. Rural mothers are in a more precarious situation given the long distances they have to walk to access health facilities. Often, the roads are impassable, more so during rainy seasons. Even when mothers make it to the health units, there are lots of other challenges: lack of personnel to attend to them leading to complications or even deaths; sometimes the health facilities, including referrals, lack basic necessities.

In some parts of the country, some pregnant mothers are asked to pay for Mama Kits - a package containing gloves, soap, a razorblade, cotton wool, and bed-sheet - when they

The issue:
Pregnancy-related deaths

Our view: The government must roll out realistic actions to promote awareness on reproductive health, with special focus on safe motherhood practices. There must be specific emphasis on timely treatment and care of pregnant mothers in health facilities.

go for antenatal services. Those who cannot pay for these essential kits that are supposed to be distributed for free in public health facilities, are forced to seek services of traditional birth attendants who do not have the kits to provide a clean and safe delivery.

Following Kaudha Magumba's death, Nakasongola District Woman MP Margaret Komuhangi, who chairs the Committee on Gender, Labour and Social Development, said her colleague's death was caused by Uganda's poor health infrastructure. As a minister once stated, "Uganda's health centres and hospitals have become places of last resort for pregnant mothers". The worrying state of our health facilities is, therefore, known by the country's leaders!

Similarly, media reports about pregnant mothers, including those in labour, being turned away from public health centres because they don't have money to buy delivery kits are

common. What we need is a sustainable solution. Of course, there have been interventions to reduce maternal mortality that have yielded positive results. According to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2016, maternal mortality ratio dropped from 438 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2011 to 336 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2016.

But this is far from desirable. The government must roll out realistic actions to promote awareness on reproductive health, with special focus on safe motherhood practices. There must be specific emphasis on timely treatment and care of pregnant mothers in health facilities.