Don't leave health services to donors, activists tell govt

Advised. Health activists say government should assume greater responsibility of financing the health sector if health care and financial protection of all citizens is to be achieved.

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MUKONO. Government should not leave health services at the hands of donors to ensure effective service delivery, health rights activists have cautioned.

The activists argue that since donors depend on grants, inefficiencies are created whenever their programmes wind up.

Such financing gaps have been blamed for the poor health sector performance indicators such as the high consistent maternal mortality rate currently at 368 deaths per 100, 000 live births and high teenage pregnancy at 25 per cent among others.

Instead, the health care champions have advised government to assume greater responsibility of financing the health sector if health care and financial protection of all citizens is to be achieved.

The call was made during the first national presidential dialogue on quality of health services in Uganda held in Mukono last Friday.

Mr Moses Dombo, the chief of party Advocacy for better health at Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health -Uganda (PATH-Uganda), said government has committed to a number of international health rights agreements without implementing them.

"There is too much dependency on donors which renders us to shortages once such projects come to an end. Our government can do better to ensure that all budget funds are released in a timely manner and used appropriately," Mr Dombo said.

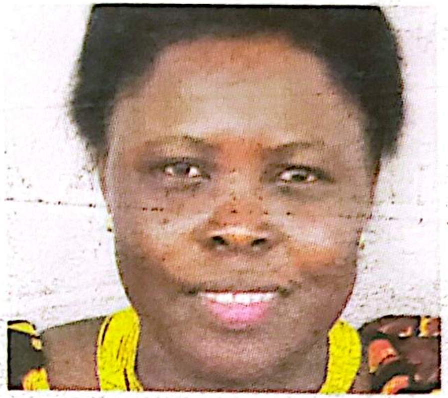
In the 2016/2017 budget, government slashed budget allocations to the Ministry of Health from last financial year's Shs1.827.26 trillion to Shs1.823.82 trillion.

This means that the overall sector share of the budget reduced to 6.2 per cent, down from 8.3 per cent.

However, the 6.2 per cent budget cut is way below the Abuja Declaration target that mandates all member states to allocate at least 15 per cent of their national budgets towards the health sector.

Worse still, only Shs911.2b of the total health sector budget, translating into 51 per cent, is financed internally while Shs889b, translating to 49 per cent, is secured from external donors.

The dialogue organised by the USAID-PATH Advocacy for Better Health project and the Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Quality of Health Service Delivery (UPAFQUES) and other civil society organisations was intended to have a collective discussion on the state of health care services in the country.



"If the reason for saying that lifesaving commodities are not available is to provide contraceptives to young adolescent mothers, we have not reached to that moral level. Uganda is a God-fearing country and we say abstinence and education is the way to go to reduce teenage pregnancy,"
DR MORIKU JOYCE KADUCU

Prof Francis Omaswa, the executive director of the African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation, criticised the recent arrest of health workers at Naguru Hospital for extorting money from patients, saying that the vices come as a result of poor pay.

"So if we arrest health workers for things that are going wrong instead of asking what's wrong with the health workers, then we miss the point," Prof Omaswa noted, advising that government should appoint parish chiefs with a job description of ensuring general cleanliness of households in communities.

However, Dr Moriku Joyce Kaducu, the State minister for Primary Health Care, also hit back at non-government health organisations, accusing them of taking advantage of the financial gaps within the sector to breach traditional social values by promoting contraceptive use among teenagers as young as 10 years old.

In his speech read by General Moses Ali, the First Deputy Prime Minister and Deputy Leader of Government Business in Parliament, President Museveni pointed out the health information gap especially in rural areas and other cultural rigidities as the two major challenges affecting government policies in the health sector.

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