National News

NSSF voluntary savings surge to Shs114 billion

BY TONNY ABET

KAMPALA. The National Social Security Fund (NSSF) has reported a strong performance of its new voluntary savings product, Smart Life Flexi, which has hit Shs114 billion from Shs21 billion last July.

Mr Stephen Omojong, the NSSF research and product development manager, revealed this yesterday during a dialogue on health financing in Uganda organised by Makerere University School of Public Health at the institution's main campus.

During a panel discussion, Mr Omojong shared a recent experience of designing and introducing a voluntary savings product as NSSF, and their eventual success.

"We thought it would be very hard. Because already, people perhaps don't want to save 15 percent. But now, we said, okay, in addition to 15 percent, you could save voluntarily with the Fund," he said.

Mr Omojong added: "With good design, we are seeing growth because in just one year, we have 68,000 people who have opted to save voluntarily, and we have collected a total of Shs114 billion."

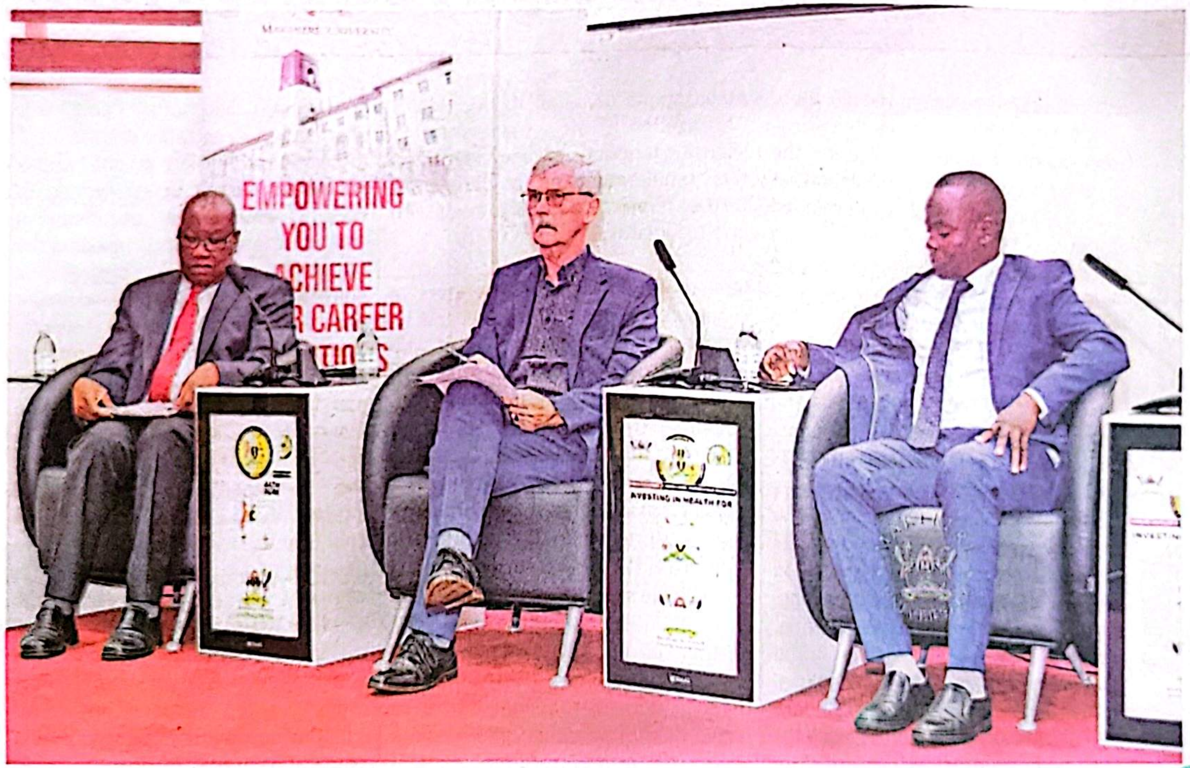
He revealed that last month alone, NSSF collected Shs17 billion. "It is growing each month. So, this is a prototype that shows that you can design a good programme, and Ugandans can embrace it. And it's good for the informal sector. It is digital, and so it is just growing on its own, and we are reasonably surprised," Mr Omojong said.

Uganda's failure to establish and operationalise a National Health Insurance Scheme to save the population from poverty caused by high out-of-pocket expenditure on health was among the key issues cited during the dialogue.

Despite having East Africa's highest proportion of the population pushed below the $3.6 (Shs13,280) poverty line by heavy out-of-pocket health expenditure, as per World Bank data, Uganda is also the only country in the region without a national health insurance scheme (NHIS). Information from the Ministry of Health indicates that the work on the NHIS Bill was started in 2004.

"It is only Uganda in the entire East Africa that doesn't have an NHIS. Why? Is it politics, is it fear? I think it is more of politics, but I want to believe that we are beginning to get there, and I think this time around we shall reach there," Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, the minister of Health, said in a separate meeting.

According to data from the World Bank, by 2016, around 3 percent of Uganda's population had been pushed below the $3.65 (Shs13,470) poverty line by out-of-pocket (OOP) health expenditure. The above number is high when compared to one percent or below of the population in other countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi, who were affected by the same, according to data from the World Bank.



Left to right: Prof Freddie Ssengooba, Dr Ian Clarke and Mr Stephen Omojong during the health financing dialogue at Makerere University, Kampala City, yesterday. PHOTO/MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

In November 2024, the NSSF launched NSSF Smartlife Flexi, which is a voluntary savings product, to increase social security coverage, targeting existing members, non-NSSF members in the formal and informal sectors, and the diaspora.

At the launch, NSSF Managing Director Patrick Ayota said: "In 2021, we conducted the NSSF Members Needs Research as we prepared to develop new products. 60 percent of our members told us that they were not saving enough and wanted more voluntary options. The research also affirmed that members need more products that address their Retirement Fund needs like education, health, and capital accumulation to start a business or seed acquisition."

68,000 VOLUNTARY SAVERS