

Sector players say fear, misinformation and constant circulation of Ebola-related updates are beginning to hurt business activity.

BY TONNY ABET

As government intensifies efforts to contain Uganda's second outbreak of Ebola Bundibugyo Disease since 2007, concerns are growing over the impact of the virus on livelihoods, tourism, healthcare services and public confidence.

Players in the tourism and health sectors say fear, misinformation and constant circulation of Ebola-related updates on social media are beginning to hurt business activity and strain front-line workers.

Mr Simplicious Gessa, the head of public relations at Uganda Tourism Board (UTB), told *Daily Monitor* that the sector is feeling the pressure from reports circulating online.

"We have received information from private sector tourism players indicating a number of cancellations as a result of some irresponsible reports," Mr Gessa said yesterday, although he did not provide figures.

According to the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, the sector contributed Shs6.06 trillion to Uganda's Gross Domestic Product in 2024, accounting for 3.2 percent of the economy as the industry recovered from the effects of Covid-19.

Industry players now fear the gains could be reversed if the outbreak escalates or if international perceptions worsen.

Mr Deogratius Muhumuza, the founder of Uganda Eco Tours, said many operators are anxious about the speed at which Ebola-related information

How fear over Ebola is hurting tourism, health



Some of the temporary facilities, which have been constructed at the former Mulago playground to isolate suspected Ebola patients. PHOTO/ STEPHEN OTAGE

spreads online.

"We are worried about these frequent updates by the Ministry of Health. On our side it is not yet so bad, but I know colleagues who have already received cancellations," he said.

However, UTB defended the need for transparent communication, saying public health emergencies naturally create concern among travellers.

"Uganda has strong systems to monitor, manage and communicate effectively during such situations," Mr Gessa said. The Ministry of Health insists it

Tourism concerns:
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will continue issuing regular updates as part of Uganda's obligations under the international health regulations (IHRs),

which require countries to report disease outbreaks with epidemic potential within 24 hours.

Ministry position

Dr Diana Atwine, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health, said information sharing remains essential in controlling the outbreak and protecting public safety.

"Uganda remains committed to continued cooperation and information sharing to safeguard the health and safety of the people," she said.

According to the ministry, Uganda currently has seven confirmed Ebola cases, four active cases, one recovery and one death involving a Congolese national. About 500 contacts are being monitored, with the virus having an incubation period of 21 days.

Dr Charles Olaro, the director general of Health Services, said government would continue providing regular updates to keep citizens informed.

"As the Ministry of Health, we have been transparent. I want to assure the country and the world that we will get this outbreak under control as soon as possible," Dr Olaro said.

He also warned against spreading rumours and misinformation, saying fear can undermine response efforts.

Beyond tourism, the outbreak is also affecting the health sector, particularly private health facilities whose workers came into contact with Ebola patients.

Dr Joseph Gavin Nyanzi, the chairperson for ethics and professionalism at the Uganda Medical Association, said more than 100 health workers from affected private facilities have been quarantined.

"Slightly above 100 health workers — doctors and nurses — from facilities where some Ebola patients were treated have been quarantined," Dr Nyanzi said.

Health experts warn that prolonged quarantine periods can cause anxiety, stress and depression among health workers while also creating staffing shortages in hospitals and clinics.

Despite these challenges, the Ministry of Health says it is prioritising continuity of essential services and does not intend to shut down affected health facilities unless absolutely necessary.