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It is high time we invested more in the health sector

After the violence over the age limit debate in Parliament, it was reported that two Ugandan Members of Parliament Betty Namboozee and Francis Zaake were taken for medical attention in India and the United States of America respectively. We should all wish the two a full recovery. Their treatment abroad was paid for by taxpayers, which should raise eyebrows regardless of their political affiliations.

MPs can get "world class" medical attention, but not the poor Ugandans whom they represent. 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others,' a phrase in *Animal Farm*, comes to mind when it comes to accessing quality healthcare in Uganda.

What do government officials who have benefited from treatment abroad at the expense of the burdened taxpayers who can't afford such luxuries make of this asymmetry? At the end of the day, Uganda loses.

Uganda with a GDP per capita of about \$650, spends nearly \$150 million for treating government officials abroad. This should be classified as a net outflow because taxpayers' money is flowing out of the country and benefiting the healthcare of other countries such as Kenya, South Africa, India, the UK and the USA.

This is happening at a time when Ugandan doctors are complaining of poor remuneration and sorry state of health facilities while the government claims there is no money. Forgive the cliché, but isn't it time that all stakeholders invested in the Ugandan healthcare?

The poor state of healthcare in Uganda and many other African coun-

ff **The fact.** What would be the state of healthcare if all African governments implemented the Abuja Declaration? A healthy nation is a wealthy nation. For Uganda to achieve middle-income status, stakeholders should strive to improve the Ugandan health care system. It is cheaper, for the most part than sending government officials abroad.

tries has led to an alarming medical brain drain. This is manifested by a doctor to the patient ratio of 1:2,400 - the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends 1:1000). There are many Ugandan medical professionals who have sought greener pastures in neighbouring countries, Southern Africa, the UK and North America due to poor welfare and facilities at home.

The WHO ranks Uganda's health system at 149 out of 191 countries. The methodology used was measuring how well a country achieves its goals (improvement in the health of the population, the responsiveness of the healthcare system to the legitimate expectations of the population, and fairness in financing and financial risk protection) simultaneously.

In the East African Community, Uganda ranks better than Tanzania and Rwanda, but worse than Kenya and Burundi, which have the smallest economy in the region.

According to the Abuja Declaration

(2001), member nations of the African Union pledged to increase their health budget to at least 15 per cent of the state's annual budget. How is Uganda doing? The health budget for the financial year 2017/2018 is nearly six per cent of the national budget, and in the financial year 2016/2017, it was nearly nine per cent.

Uganda and other African countries are not doing well. Ethiopia, the Gambia, Malawi and Swaziland have achieved their target. Let us keep in mind that a Declaration is a formal statement or announcement, which is not legally binding and hence governments are not obligated to meet the pledge.

What would be the state of healthcare if all African governments implemented the Abuja Declaration? Your guess is as good as mine.

A healthy nation is a wealthy nation. For Uganda to achieve middle-income status, stakeholders should strive to improve the Ugandan health care system. It is cheaper, for the most part than sending government officials abroad.

The real winners will be Ugandan factors. The National Planning Authority should formulate strategies to ensure Ugandan doctors do not leave the country and attract Ugandan doctors in the Diaspora to return and contribute towards the country's development. For this to happen, the government has to make sacrifices in terms of resource allocation and prioritisation.

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