

Experts want health funds streamlined

By Cecilia Okoth

Dr Peter Okwero, a senior health specialist with the World Bank, has proposed that Uganda streamlines funding to the health sector by creating a pool where all donors can contribute money to solve existing challenges in the health sector.

Okwero said just like other developing countries, Uganda faces key problems of disproportionate burden of disease, where resources do not match the health challenges.

He, however, added that having too many partners/donors presents difficulty in managing them, saying there are fragmented systems and an inadequate government system.

"If you have 50 people who are trying to work in your home, isn't that a problem? This is exactly what the health ministry is grappling with."

They have to deal with all partners who come to finance various projects but they also create their own systems, employ their own people, which presents a challenge in terms of planning and coordination," he said.

He said instead partners should adopt the programmes and systems in place and not the reverse.

Okwero made the remarks during a presentation on opportunities for pooling donor funding at the third UK-East Africa health improvement and investment summit in Kampala on Thursday.

The summit's theme was: "Strengthening investments to improve healthcare" Dr Diana Atwine, the health ministry's permanent secretary, said if governments were to achieve Sustainable Development

"We welcome partners who genuinely want to invest with us. However, there are those who come with different interests that are not in line with the ministry," Atwine

Goals, there must be efforts to increase the collaboration in areas of technology, training of medical skills, research and infrastructure development.

She, advised investors seeking to invest in Uganda and East Africa to adhere to the countries' strategic plans and priorities.

"We welcome partners who genuinely want to invest with us. However, there are those who come with different interests that are not in line with the ministry's strategic plan," Atwine said.

"There are also those who just want to tell us what to do because they have the money," she said.

Lord Dolar Popat, the UK prime minister's trade envoy to Uganda and Rwanda, said whereas the African continent had come a long way in tackling health problems,

more work needed to devise more solutions. "Modern life brings new challenges. Old diseases have given way to new epidemics, which are spreading beyond national borders."

"Health, therefore, is now a global issue which requires a global response for the benefit of all," he said, adding

that the UK would continue supporting Africa in its journey to prosperity and health.

Reading a speech by President Yoweri Museveni, the state minister for finance, Gabriel Ajeedra, said the East African region had endless opportunities which would be profitable under strategic investment. "I encourage

partnerships between regional players and foreign investors through various business models like joint ventures," he said.

"In this way, some of the local industries will be supported to prosper," he said, adding that the potential of the health sector was underutilised despite its large resource.

"In Uganda, for example, the pharmaceutical industry still uses imported pharmaceutical grade starch and pharmaceutical grade sugar."

"Both are crucial for making tablets and syrups for children's medicines. Yet we have maize, cassava and sugar produced in plenty locally," he said.

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The British High Commissioner to Uganda, Peter West (left) listens to the state minister for finance Gabriel Ajeedra (right) at the UK-East Africa Health Summit.