

More work needed in Ebola control

With the Ugandan authorities handling an Ebola outbreak that has resulted in two deaths and isolation of 127 contacts so far, the Ebola response is no mean task at this point. To compound matters, schools will reopen before the month is out and a number of political gatherings were still on the calendar given the swearing ceremonies and congratulatory parties for incoming office bearers across the country.

Add to that religious ceremonies, festivals and related travel and you have a truly complex public health situation. Handling schools alone—close to 70,000 in number at pre-primary and primary level, according to the Uganda Education Abstract 2025 (Vol I), is enough to cause a major headache.

Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) have been shared for how these institutions and their management shall handle learners, visitors and the daily business of school life.

Yet these SoPs, while good, assume certain conditions, which are not necessarily uniformly prevailing across our educational institutions across the country. While encouraging constant handwashing and sanitation, it must be put into consideration that for the more than two million learners (2,044,586) at Secondary school level, there are 42,654 toilet and latrine stances, with or without doors and shutters and including the facilities used by teachers.

According to the Education Abstract 2017, which gave the most recent detailed breakdown of water sources used by schools, out of 20,350 primary schools visited during ASC 2017; 8,906 (44 percent) used borehole water, followed by those using Rain Water Harvest 5,892 (29 percent), while 582 (three percent) used lake/river water.

Without delving into the issues of space in boarding school dormitories, ventilation and issues of overcrowding, managing educational institutions under the Ebola outbreak already presents a quandary.

While the authorities may have averted a potential public health crisis with the postponement of the June 3 Martyrs Day celebrations that were slated to bring in pilgrims from near and far, trekking across the country and borderlines to reach Namugongo, the worst is not over, given conditions on the ground.

Outside of the Martyrs Day event traffic, we still have a large travelling public moving through loosely regulated or, until now, unregulated bus and motor stops. Many of these will remain untracked once they reach their destinations. Temperature guns had gone out of use with the Covid-19 pandemic. The assumption of the SoPs is that all this is available at a moment's notice to contain the outbreak. More work is needed in this fight.

The issue:

Ebola

Our view:

The assumption of the Standard Operating Procedures is that all containment tools like temperature guns is available at a moment's notice to contain the outbreak. More work is needed in this fight.

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