



How donated equipment has improved health in Kamuli, Kalangala districts

By Nicholas Wassajja and Tom Gwebayanga

Maximilia Zalwango, 23, a single mother, runs a small groceries stall in Mbulamuti, a sub-county in the eastern district of Kamuli.

She is currently undergoing treatment at Kamuli Mission Hospital to cure Green Tobacco Sickness (GTS); a rare condition caused by tobacco cultivation that she acquired three years ago while she worked at a Tobacco plantation in Maracha district in the West Nile.

GTS is a consequence of nicotine absorption due to skin exposure and inhaling of tobacco that weakens the body with acute headaches, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, chills, fluctuations in blood pressure and breathing difficulties caused by TB-like symptoms that Zalwango at first ignored.

"I opted to work at tobacco plantations after the father of my son abandoned me, yet I was a teenage mother then. I thought it was just a cough until an X-Ray scan was taken and was diagnosed with GTS," Zalwango narrates.

Her hope to live another healthy day to fend for her four-year-old son is made alive by the refurbishment and specialised equipment at Kamuli Hospital. The hospital has acquired X-Ray machines and CT scans

donated by foreign partners that Parliament Speaker, Rebecca Kadaga, courted while at an international conference.

According to Ranny Ismail, the Parliament assistant director of communications, "It is not only in Kamuli. Through such engagements, the Speaker has received various donations to facilitate Kakuuto Hospital in Rakai and Kalangala health centre IV in the Islands. The people benefit both directly and indirectly, especially in the key sectors of health and education."

Kamuli hospital

Unlike in the past when patients decried the poor medical services in Kamuli Hospital due to lack of drugs, medical equipment and dubious charges by medics, the arrival of the medical equipment from the US has improved the welfare of the clients in the referral government facility. For 10 consecutive years, due to the defunct X-ray and scan machines, pregnant mothers and patients, suffering from critical ailments were always referred to Jinja Hospital, while many ended up in private clinics.

The battery of the Spanish-donated X-ray crashed in 2002 and had not been replaced for over 10 years.

A big number of women, especially pregnant mothers and those in labour, shunned the facility due to the absence of examination machines such as the

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scanner, fetus monitor machine and infant warmer.

In 2015, Charles Galimaka, a resident of Kasongire in Buyende, got a rib fracture and sought X-ray services at the hospital, only to be referred to Jinja, where he spent sh95,000 in examination fees and transport, minus drugs.

The situation changed in October 2016, when Kadaga, who is also the Kamuli Woman MP, lobbied for medical equipment worth, sh1.4b, from the US.

The equipment, donated by the Medi-Share International US and shipped to Uganda by Coca-Cola Beverage Africa (CCBA), included an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) bed, mobile stretcher, fetus monitor machine, ultrasound scanner, infant warmer and delivery set for surgery.

Others were oxygen concentrators, anaesthesia unit, patient monitor machine, wheelchairs, delivery beds, electrical surgical unit, mama kits, gloves and crutches for

accident patients, among others.

The acting medical superintendent, Dr Charles Waako, says since the hospital received the equipment, there has been an increase in patients seeking free services.

"In the first two weeks, we registered a remarkable turn-up of pregnant mothers and those in labour," Waako says.

Sarah Birungi, a mother from Namukunhu in

Buyende, who delivered a baby boy recently, says: "In the past, the medics used to charge us, but this time, I only bought my meals."

Since January, Waako says, close to 900 patients have been treated using the new equipment and they were still counting, thanks to the US donors and the Speaker.

"Referrals have dropped drastically, from 60 to less than 10 per month," Waako says, adding that with the availability of the oxygen concentrators and infant warmers, child mortality has dropped from 12 to less than three deaths per month.

In the maternity ward, the mothers hailed the midwives' approach and hospitality. "They were hostile in the past, but they are now kind, loving and professional," Jane Nalunga, a disabled girl who delivered by caesarean section, says, adding, "I was examined by the machines at no cost and I delivered without anyone asking me to pay money," she adds.