

UGANDA PEOPLES CONGRESS

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Healthcare neglect not population explosion is the main worry for Ugandan women and children

Narrative

Last week the State of Uganda Population report was launched at Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala by the Population Secretariat. The report focused on population and reproductive health issues, and one of the facts stated was that Uganda's population will clock 103.2 million by 2050. According to the report, which was simultaneously launched with the latest state of the world population report by the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the rate [3.2%] at which our population is growing is the main worry. This fact was however erroneously used by the state minister for planning Hon. Matia Kasaija to justify persistent failure by government of Uganda to check the country's high maternal and infant mortality rates. To-date 137/1,000 babies and 345/100,000 mothers die in one year from the date of birth or over pregnancy related complications respectively. The report points out that on average 16 women [one Kamunye] die in Uganda every day over pregnancy related complications. This means that to-date 365 Kamunyes (omnibus taxis) of women perish in a year. This trend is indeed very unfortunate but to attribute it to the rising population of Uganda is to be extremely myopic.

Uganda Peoples Congress wants to stress that these severe levels of infant and maternal mortality rates are caused by healthcare neglect characteristic of the NRM regime. The acute lack of reproductive health care in the country, safe motherhood programs and sufficient medical personnel to provide pre-natal, antenatal and post-natal services cannot be blamed on population explosion. Absence of adolescent reproductive services also continues to hurt this country especially given the fact that 69 per cent of Ugandans are youthful.

This is the time government of Uganda should be telling us how much contribution it has made in the health sector in terms of training, recruitment and remuneration of medical personnel; establishment and coverage of the health centers, hospitals and other necessary infrastructure; provision of required equipment and drugs; and in demystifying to the public the tactics for disease prevention and control.

Measuring all these against our population growth rate would offer scientific comparison as to how many lives of women and children have been saved annually so line government departments can plan better on how to progressively reduce the infant and maternal mortality rates.

President Museveni keeps boasting of having established over 1700 health centers in his 25 years of tenure so far. What the president may not know is that most of these health centers have long turned into resting places for village goats. Not only do the health centers lack drugs they also are deficient of qualified medical personnel. They have indeed become death centers as opposed to

health centers. This explains why, according to a report by Makerere University Institute of Public Health, out-of-pocket spending by patients contributes between 58 – 75% of the total health care financing in Uganda. Privately provided services (including small clinics and drug shops) are estimated to constitute about 70% of total curative care in the country.

It also explains why a minimum of 73% of women in labor prefer to be delivered by traditional birth attendants or in private clinics. This is a complete vote of no confidence in government health services. Kabale hospital has just 7 out of the required 37 doctors to handle patients on a daily basis. The hospital management has had to privately decide to top up the meager shs 780,000 salary for doctors with shs 400,000 to attract more qualified doctors. In Kawolo hospital, Jinja many deaths of pregnant women, most of who in labor, have been reported in recent months over delays by nurses to attend to them. Of course this partly stems out of the fact that the ratio of medical practitioners to the population still stands at a miserable 1:10,000. This can only be checked if government emphasizes training of more medical personnel as opposed to focusing on population control.

Not many years ago, the ministry of health under the wise leadership of Maj. Gen. Jim Muhwezi imported pickup trucks for ambulances. If you are not a pygmy [reference made in good faith] your legs need to be broken for you to fit. No wonder most district politicians have found these trucks convenient for their daily movements.

Recommendations

1. Whereas we in UPC support family planning in Uganda, we think government, through the National Planning Authority, should institute periodical reviews on population growth vis-a-vis economic development to ensure positive correlation between the two at all times.
2. We challenge government to increase healthcare budgetary allocation up to 15% of the national budget in order to be able to respond to the growing need for drugs, trained medical personnel, equipment and the necessary health infrastructure
3. Rehabilitate and expand all government nursing schools to enable them double their annual intakes
4. Full rehabilitate all 13 regional referral hospitals and recruit at least 10 doctors and 20 nurses for each of the 22 rural hospitals, and to provide medical personnel to all health centers in the country
5. Ensure adequate ambulances for every hospital in the country
6. Construct 4 regional hospitals for children's specialized medical care.
7. Increase salaries of all medical personnel [doctors, nurses, midwives, e.t.c] by 100%, provide proper housing facilities and make all conditions of service comparable to those of neighbouring countries
8. Scrap cost sharing on all health care services
9. Build capacity of National Drug Authority to detect fake and illicit Anti-Retrovirals (ARVs) and other drugs on the market
10. Build capacity of the drug monitoring unit to check corruption in drug distribution

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