MPs want funding for Village Health Teams

By Lawrence Mulondo

KAMPALA

MPs on the parliamentary committee of health have asked the Government to set aside funds to facilitate Village Health Teams (VHT) as a way of motivating them.

The team made the appeal on Monday, during a field visit in Kawempe division, Kampala. The tour was organised by Living Goods, a non-governmental organisation, to inspect some of the works done by VHTs.

The committee chairperson and MP for Bukuya, Dr Michael Bukenya, said they would hold discussions with their colleagues to ensure that resources are allocated to VHTs in order to improve the services rendered to communities.

“Our committee recognises the great contribution by the VHTs to Primary Health Care (PHC). We also recognise that PHC is a key factor to attaining universal health coverage,” he said.

Bukenya added that 72% of the population lives far from health centres which makes VHTs necessary to bridge the gap.

The MPs jumped over drainage channels in slums to witness how VHTs access patients, sensitize the locals on nutrition and measure patients’ temperatures, among others. They also interacted with slum dwellers.

Ntwenwe County MP Joel Sebbekali said they had realised that a number of people are comfortable with the services of VHTs compared to workers in health facilities.

Butaleja Woman MP Milly Mugeni called on the Government and other development partners to invest in health promotion to prevent diseases.

“We found a woman who delivered at Kampala Hospital. However, she was discharged without her baby being immunised. If a VHT had not seen her during the family visits, the child would have missed out on crucial immunisation,” she said.

Kyenjojo Woman MP Spellanza Muhenda said more partners in the health sector should extend more of their support to VHTs in rural areas, as health centres there are scattered and people rely more on VHTs.

VHTs, health strategy

In 2001, the health ministry established the VHT strategy as an innovative approach to empower communities to participate and improve their own health and services at community and household level.

Despite the VHT strategy, rural access to healthcare due to the mix of preventive and basic curative roles, the health status of Uganda’s population remains relatively poor with high morbidity and mortality from preventable causes due to gaps and challenges faced in implementation of the strategy.

According to Living Goods’ country director Emilie Chambert, the health ministry plans to establish the National Community Health Extension Workers policy and Strategy.

“In 2018, we assisted the Ministry to draft and submitted a regulatory impact assessment, a new prerequisite in the country for evidence-based approval of any new policy Bill or regulation to cabinet,” she said.

Chambert said her organisation has been supporting VHTs and 3,244 government community health workers in the districts of Wakiso, Mityana, Luwero, Mpigi, Masaka, Kyotera and Kalangala.

Others are Mukono, Kayunga, Jinja, Buikwe, Mayuge, Iganga, Mbale, Manafwa, Namisindwa, Bududa, Sironko, Lira and Kampala.

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