

Concerns of persistent drug stock-outs, low health supplies raised by CSOs



CSBAG Policy Specialist speaks during the presentation of the Health sector position paper. On his left is Simon Mugenyi, a CSBAG member from Reproductive Health Uganda together with other CSO members. Inset (above), one of the MPs on the Health committee responding to the position paper.

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Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have expressed concern over the persistent stock-out of essential medicines and health supplies at different health facilities across the country.

According to the CSOs under their body the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG), there are continued stock-outs of drugs and supplies at different levels in the health system.

“This countrywide problem, has been raised by people and highlighted in Baraza reports. What is of great concern is that there are deaths attributed to treatable diseases like malaria due to failure to access drugs in public health facilities yet the National Medical Stores (NMS) is fully stocked with drugs,” Simon Richard Mugenyi, a member of CSBAG told MPs on Tuesday.

The CSOs, had on Tuesday, April 10th 2018, appeared before the Parliamentary committee on health, to present the CSOs position paper on the health sector ministerial policy statement, for the FY 2018/19.

Unnecessary drugs

Quoting the FY 2016/17 government annual performance report, the CSOs noted that there have been persistent complaints from the health facilities that they are supplied with drugs which they don't require when specific requests are made in advance to NMS.

The CSOs recommended that NMS and the ministry of health ensure that drugs are supplied to all health facilities in accordance to the needs of the people.

They also want part of the increment on output 224-supplies and services under Vote 116, NMS be allocated to cover the Sh18b to Family planning and reproductive health commodities as committed in the Family Planning 2020 government commitments.

“We also reiterate our call to government to operationalize the HIV/AIDS trust fund that can help to bridge the funding gap of Sh116b,” The CSOs noted in their presentation to the committee.

Expired drugs

The CSOs also brought to the attention of the MPs, the high cost of destruction of expired drugs, which money they said can be utilized to improve health care through increasing access to health care services.

It should be noted that in February 2018, the ministry of health announced that over 1,200 tons of expired drugs and other health supplies would be destroyed from 6,619 health centres to create space for adequate storage of medicines and other health supplies.

“The Cost implication in the destruction of these drugs is extremely high. This high cost may in part be attributed to delays in distribution of drugs by NMS to 649 health centers, amounting to Sh3.5b at the end of FY 2016/17,” Mugenyi told MPs.

The CSOs recommended proper planning by the NMS through factoring in the time taken to procure and distribute the drugs adding that; “These drugs should have a minimum number of years shelf life to avoid expiring before their use”.

The CSOs also proposed electronic drug monitoring systems to be established right from delivery to prescription and dispensing to patients.

Mental health budget

In their presentation, the CSOs also expressed concern over the stagnant funding to Butabika hospital despite the increasing mental health cases. The CSOs noted that the total number of admission and outpatient numbers for the hospital increased from 57,338 patients in FY 2015/16 to 78,803 patients in FY 2016/17. However despite this, the budget for the hospital had been increased by only 15% from Sh12.5b in FY 2017/18, to Sh14.7b in FY 2018/19.

As a way forward, the CSOs recommended increased financing for supplies including medicines, capital purchase such as X-ray services and beds to accommodate the increasing number of mental health cases.

Meanwhile the committee chaired by Bukuya county MP Dr. Michael Bukenya commended the CSOs for their position paper and advised them to do more health promotion especially in the area of environmental health.

The committee chairperson Dr. Bukenya, said the committee would discuss the issues and recommendations raised in the position paper, for consideration in the final report on the health budget for the FY2018/19.