

## OPINION

## Upgrading hospitals no silver bullet

The Government has decided to upgrade three hospitals around the city (Naguru, Kawempe and Kirundu) to regional referral level. This is a welcome move because the change in status gives these units autonomy, more funding, staffing and direct supervision from the Ministry of Health.

This upgrade, however, should not let us lose focus on the deficiencies in the health sector, which must be addressed conclusively, if services are to improve. First, all health units across the country (but mostly up-county) are understaffed. Until we focus on filling all the existing vacancies, the health sector will continue to struggle.

Secondly, health sector suffers very low morale. While low pay has been cited as a major cause of dissatisfaction, medical personal have also complained of poor working conditions, lack of housing, lack of training and promotion opportunities.

Demoralised staff at lower hospitals have often simply referred patients up the ladder until the referrals get clogged – and with each referral failing to cope, we create another. The solution, therefore, is to fix problems at the lower healthcare levels.

The third issue in the failing health system is maintenance of bio-medical equipment. The *New Vision* has published story after story of non-functional equipment from x-rays to abandoned theaters. And then there is the distribution chain for drugs, vaccines and blood which have all been a major let down.

Lastly, the issue of brain drain has to be addressed. Uganda is estimated to be training up to 500 doctors each year. That is about 5,000 doctors in 10 years and 10,000 in the last 20 years.

But the country has less than 3,000 doctors in active practice with the rest either out of the country or having abandoned the profession.

A key concern about the brain drain is that it has removed experienced doctors who would be tutors and mentors from the system leaving patients at the mercy of fresh graduates who learn by error. And an error in medicine is often a life lost. Even the best of the referrals are often manned by interns.

These short-comings must be addressed to make the health sector great again.

## New Vision

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The athletes who won medals at the Commonwealth games were among over 150 people awarded medals on Labour Day

## Rosa Malango, UN Resident Coordinator

# Revitalise local government system

Every May 1, United Nations Member States honour the contribution of workers to national development.

This year's theme – "Promoting the Public Spirit in the Public Sector", reminds us of what is needed in most developing countries including Uganda. More and better jobs, decent working conditions and a better work culture infused by positive values.

There is no greater virtue to be found in a citizen than the public spirit and this is why it is very important for every individual to identify themselves with the interests of nation, community or organisation that they serve. This is an opportunity to recall that universal values such as ethics are deeply ingrained in all cultures, including African culture based on time tested wisdom. Today inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals we have an opportunity to rekindle our spirit of public service by linking it to our heritage.

In Southern Africa, 'Ubuntu' is a widely cherished and practiced indigenous cultural philosophy based on the notion that 'a universal bond of sharing connects all humanity': That 'my humanity is connected and is inextricably bound up with yours.'

That is why last month we joined our South African brothers and sisters to mourn the loss of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, a leader who dedicated her life to serve the people of her nation. A related cultural value in Uganda is 'Obuntu bulami', an expression of 'healthy humanness' that conveys 'the possession of courtesy, compassion, good upbringing and being cultured. We also have 'Bulungi bwansi' literally translated into 'service or for the good of the community' in other words 'public spirit' - which promotes volunteerism based on good ethics.

These values are enshrined in the National Ethical Values Policy and promote sustainable development.

The thread of *bulungi bwansi* runs central in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are a reflection of the global public spirit. The United Nations was founded on ideals of promoting the public spirit. The preamble of the UN Charter states that, 'We the people of the United Nations determined ... to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom ... to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples'; which

illuminates the public spirit.

In Uganda, the United Nations Systems, which includes 18 agencies, supports the Government and people of Uganda to achieve the national development objectives outlined in Vision 2040 and the Second National Development Plan (NDP II) through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

At the heart of this and the 2030 Agenda is a shared ambition to develop opportunities for sustainable job creation and inclusive growth.

Uganda is widely recognised for producing a wide range of excellent policies on social, economic and development issues. It is key to ensure that people in public service at all levels are well informed of existing policies and are able to define new approaches to ensure implementation.

The UN system in Uganda stands ready to support the Government of Uganda in the transition from good policies to good practices so that the public sector can effectively fulfil the public spirit and people across the nation can be part of improving their quality of life.

There is also need to revitalise the Local Government System: Uganda's Local Government System has in the past been widely acclaimed as a global example to fulfill the public spirit. However, it is now recognised that this local government system is not functioning optimally.

There are numerous efforts by various development partners to support the Government to address capacity building challenges for a while without significant results. We need renewed leadership to re-examine how to revitalise the Local Government System given that it is the branch of the public sector, which engages most directly with citizens.

A strengthened local government system is key, if we are to successfully implement the National Vision 2040 including transformational policies with regards to youth empowerment, inclusive green growth and refugee management. The United Nations System in

Uganda is committed to engaging with the Government, private sector, cultural and religious leaders so that the local government system can play its role as a platform to address the needs of citizens and the revitalisation of the national public spirit.

The writer is the UN Resident Coordinator/UN Resident Representative



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