

## CSOs want Sh5b start-up capital for National Health Insurance, express concern over Health budget cuts



Hon. Dr. Sam Lyomoki (middle) responds to submissions made by the Civil Society Budget advocacy Group (CSBAG). Looking on is Simon Richard Mugenyi, Advocacy and Communication Manager, Reproductive Health Uganda

**“ Members of the civil society movement have asked the government, to consider allocating Sh5b in the 2017/2018 financial year budget as start-up capital for the National Health Insurance scheme.”**

The Civil society organizations (CSOs) under their umbrella body, the Civil society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG), are concerned that the continued shelving of the Bill, may affect the establishment of a National Health Insurance Scheme.

In its 2017/2018 ministerial policy statement to parliament, the Ministry of Health didn't allocate any budget, neither make a mention of the much anticipated Health Scheme, which according to the CSOs, has been shelved for long. "Government

should consider allocating Sh5b start-up capital institutional set up for the National Health Insurance scheme.

As CSOs, we propose an inter-ministerial team, drawn from the Ministry of Finance, Public Service and Health to harmonize the contentious issues in the Bill and provide a certificate of financial implication, Patrick Ojulong, a CSBAG member said.

He made the remarks on Saturday, while Presenting CSBAG's position paper on the health sector ministerial policy statement, to the Parliamentary committee on health, at Garuga Lake resort in Entebbe.

Despite government's plan to institute a compulsory public social health insurance scheme, the National Health Insurance Bill 2007, has for years not been considered by the executive, pending issuance of a certificate of financial implication by the ministry of finance. "Non-prioritization of this Bill, can cause it to be delayed further, we need to work on the modalities on how to have it considered, because the more we shelve it, the more it will lose relevancy," Raymond Ruyoka, the district advocacy officer Reproductive Health Uganda, told the MPs.

According to the National budget frame work paper for the financial year 2017/2018, the government, had allocated Sh13.7b for the national health insurance scheme, but in the final draft of the ministerial policy statement of the ministry of health, the money was not highlighted, which according to the CSOs, causes questions about the implementation of the scheme.

### Ministers summoned

To explain the progress on the national health insurance scheme/Bill, the committee chaired by MP Michael Bukenya, issued summons to ministers of finance and health, to update parliament on the health insurance Bill especially the pending certificate of financial implication. "There are technical issues which we have to deal with first. We cannot consider the Bill, without a certificate of financial implication, so the ministers have to come and tell us, where this certificate is, we hope if passed into law, the health insurance Bill, will solve a number of issues in the health sector," Dr. Bukenya said.

The committee commended CSBAG, for its proposals on the health sector, especially on the health scheme, saying that the Bill needs also to consider the non-working group (poor Ugandans) and not only the working class.

In his submission, Kasambya county MP Gaffa Mbwaterkamwa noted that just like neighbouring countries like Rwanda, which have embraced the public health insurance policy, Uganda needed to bring on board people in the informal sector, as contributors and beneficiaries of the health scheme. "We need to consider the common man on the ground, and not only the working class, we should not only target the corporate class, health issues cut across," he said.

### Health Budget cuts

In their budgetary proposals, CSOs, also expressed concern over the reduction in financial support towards the ministry of health, which they said is likely to affect health service delivery in the country.

According to the ministry of health Ministerial Policy Statement, the allocations to the sector, for the financial year 2017/18, are projected to slightly decline about 0.8%, from Sh1,828.07b, in the financial year 2016/17, to Sh1,810.25b.

The CSOs, also expressed worry over Uganda's continued dependency on development partners, to service the budget for crucial sectors like health. "Half of the health sector budget, will be through external financing, while the government contribution, to the sector, will be 50%. This even gets worse, when it comes to HIV/AIDs program, whose reliance heavily depends on external funding," Ojulong said.

### Delivery of drugs

The CSOs, also shared their disappointments with the National Medical Stores (NMS) which they said has exhibited inefficiencies in distribution and delivery of drugs to health centers.

In their submission, the CSOs noted that a number of regional referral hospitals, like Kabale, Lira, Mbarara, Naguru Chinese hospital and Jinja had placed orders for delivery of drugs with NMS, but the only government drugs delivery body, failed to honor the requests.

"We are going to lose a lot of money just because NMS doesn't want to deliver drugs, and in the process, the drugs expire," Simon Mugenyi, the advocacy and communications manager Reproductive health Uganda said. To ensure efficient and timely delivery of drugs, the committee has resolved to call for a meeting between regional referral hospitals and NMS, to iron out issues of drug deliveries.

According to Dr. Bukenya, the committee chairperson, most hospitals, according to NMS, don't place orders on time thus the late delivery or no delivery of drugs to such facilities.

The MPs also noted the need for an increment in the NMS budget, for efficient delivery of drugs to health centers across the country.

### Budgetary re-allocations

For improved welfare of health workers and better health service delivery in the country, the CSOs, also proposed some budgetary re-allocations to cater for areas that are less funded. In their position paper, the CSOs proposed that out of the Sh49b total maintenance cost for idle equipment, Sh9.2b, development budget of local governments, should be oriented to functionalizing and maintaining the idle equipment.

The committee welcomed the proposals and pledged to pass them onto to the ministry of health, for consideration. The ministry is expected to appear before the committee next week, as parliament starts on the budget process.