

AMBULANCES KEY IN UGANDA'S HEALTH CARE

1. INTRODUCTION

At an estimated 674 ambulances required, **Uganda has a deficit of 225 ambulances.** As per the 2019 Ambulance Census, Uganda has a total of 449 functional ambulances of which 94 (i.e. 21%) are grounded. Moreover, the remaining 405 functional ambulances are disproportionately distributed in favor of urban areas.

Even if they were to be evenly distributed across the 134 districts, each district would have only 3 functional ambulances, which would still remain inadequate for response and management of COVID-19.



Drill by Emergency care providers convey a casualty into an ambulance during First Aid Skills Training by Uganda Red Cross at Kololo Airstrip

2. THE EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES POLICY AS A REDRESS MECHANISM

The ineffective ambulance system necessitated development of an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) policy, which awaits cabinet approval. The EMS policy seeks to guide and streamline establishment of structures that will improve emergency response and service delivery from – the entire National Ambulance service system generally.

EMS policy, when operationalized, will lower the cost of ambulance services, currently dominated by private entities with exorbitant charges. Ambulance services within Kampala is at an average of Shs 150,000 while for peripheral areas like West Nile, the cost can go up to 3m/- to transport a patient to Kampala.

The policy provides for training of emergency care professionals (including drivers), functionality of emergency units at health facilities regionally; and public health education on emergencies. Government will meet operational costs of the ambulances, fuel, general repair, toll-free lines and drivers' allowances. If implemented, the scheme is envisaged to mitigate the impact of sudden onset of life-threatening conditions and avert the needless and premature death of Ugandans.

3. COSTS AND SPECIFICATIONS OF AMBULANCE SYSTEMS

Ambulance system grades and cost vary according to versatility. A basic ambulance should have emergency kits to administer first aid, have oxygen on board, and blood monitoring equipment. Super-modernized one must be an equivalent of an Intensive Care Unit on wheels.



A traditional ambulance (woven stretcher – “engozi”) managed by engozi self-help groups still in use in some parts of hard to reach hilly areas of Kigezi, in SW Uganda (courtesy of carter center).

Starting with repair of the 94 grounded ambulances, Ministry of Health should allocate more resources for procurement of new ambulances to reduce the ambulance gap establish call centers at Regional Referral Hospitals, coordinate, fuel and maintain ambulances in all regions of Uganda.

4. CONCLUSION

At the estimated cost of UGX 300m for a fully-fledged ambulance, this is affordable, given the investments in other non-critical sectors like security and state house. A big percentage of the health budget is on borrowed funds and it would be well spent if allocated to healthcare for citizens who are ultimately liable to repay.

UDN IN THE MEDIA



Above: UDN's Christine Byiringiro as guest on S24 TV giving Insight into the 2020/21 Post Budget Analysis.

Click on media link: <https://youtu.be/BVPLpRVfIKU>



Above: UDN's Peninnah Mbabazi analyzing health effect on the national budget amidst COVID -19.

Click on media link: <https://youtu.be/yj7vUChQWt4>

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