THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS! WOMEN'S HEALTH, A NATIONS' WEALTH

Medical interns in Uganda are facing a grave and recurring issue that demands immediate attention and action!

As women who are most affected by the state of healthcare in Uganda, we are deeply concerned about the challenges faced by the medical interns. While medical interns make up about 60% of the healthcare workforce in Uganda (Ministry of Health in Uganda in 2019)[1], out of the 1,068 medical interns who are placed in various health facilities across the country, 404 (38%) are male and 664 (62%) are female[2]. However, these interns are facing significant hurdles and difficulties.

On Monday 24th April 2023, a team of female medical interns set out to deliver their petitions to duty bearers about their plight. The manner in which they were handled is of great concern to us. Such incidents not only affect their immediate well-being but also have long-term implications on their participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields. This has the potential to discourage female students from pursuing careers in healthcare or STEM, hindering the development of the nation and reversing the country's efforts to increase women's participation in these fields.

Despite the promises made time and again, to improve conditions that threaten the well-being and professional growth of medical interns, they also suffer delayed deployment to government hospitals, and unpaid or delayed stipends, which

[1] Ministry of Health. (2019). Health Sector Development Plan 2015/16–2019/20. https://www.health.go.ug/cause/health-sector-development-plan-201516-201920/

[2] Uganda Medical Association (UMA) 2021

makes it difficult for them to cover basic expenses, such as food, rent and ultimately puts their financial security at risk.

The 1995 Uganda Constitution provides for the right to work, relevant to the situation of medical interns. In addition, the Employment Act, 2006 provides for minimum terms and conditions of employment, including the payment of wages, leave entitlements and working hours. Uganda has also ratified international agreements, such as the Abuja Declaration on Health Financing, which requires the government to allocate at least 15% of the national budget to health.

Call to Action!

While we understand that the government may face limitations in meeting all priorities, we firmly believe that the health of the nation is the nation's wealth. Therefore, we urgently call on the following actions;

1. The Ministry of Health should engage in dialogue with medical interns and the leadership of the Uganda Medical Association (UMA) to address the key drivers of the weak health systems for the long term.
2. The Parliament of Uganda should effectively plan and project population growth versus the health facilities/investments and allocate at least 15% of the national budget to health, as per the Abuja Declaration on Health Financing.
3. The Ministry of Health should take steps to improve the working conditions for medical interns such as providing adequate resources, including medicine and equipment, which will help to ensure that interns can provide quality care to patients and also develop their professional skills.

We believe that by taking these steps, the Government of Uganda can help to support the well-being and professional growth of medical interns, improve the quality of healthcare in Uganda, and ultimately contribute to the prosperity of the nation.

United, Women Can!

For God and My Country!