

■ EDITORIAL

Build systems to manage medical waste

It is ironic that the very tools meant to heal, including syringes, needles and medical equipment, are now poisoning Uganda's communities because of poor disposal.

As a result, these life-saving instruments have been weaponised to become vectors of disease and environmental contamination. Every day, tonnes of hazardous waste from clinics and hospitals are dumped in banana plantations, landfills and household trash, exposing residents to infections, toxic chemicals and antimicrobial resistance.

Several stories in *New Vision's* series have exposed the risks Ugandans undergo when they encounter poorly disposed of medical waste.

These stories show a national pattern: 72.2% of households flush expired drugs down toilets and 90% lack knowledge of safe disposal. Health facilities, no matter their location and size, face broken incinerators and erratic waste collection, partly due to funding cuts.

Improper disposal fuels infections, which include Hepatitis B, HIV and cholera, through contaminated water and soil. Pharmaceutical waste seeps into ecosystems, disrupting wildlife and developing antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Incinerators, while critical, release toxic fumes if poorly managed, harming nearby communities. Uganda's population, which is nearing 46 million, generates ever more waste, but only 9.8% of facilities nationwide have proper guidelines.

The solution lies in building functional incinerators in all health facilities and maintaining them well; contracting specialised firms to handle medical waste collection and disposal, ensuring compliance with safety standards; raising awareness in communities and medical staff on segregating waste and reporting violations.

The Government must penalise improper waste disposal and fund waste management systems.



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