

# Leveraging Technology to Bridge Healthcare Gaps and Promote Wellness in Uganda

## **In Runyankore we say:**

Agyenda mpora, ahika hare; loosely translating into; even one who walks at a slow pace will still go far. But when it comes to our progress in health as a country, a slow walk is no longer sustainable. Access to quality healthcare remains limited, both physically and practically. Today, we are learning to walk with purpose, or even run by leveraging a powerful tool we all hold in our hands: technology.

Think about Nnaalongo Deborah, a twin mother staying in a remote village in Luweero. When her son Kato develops a fever, the nearest clinic is 16 kilometers away, and she cannot cover medical bills. She picks up her phone, texts a Community

Health Worker in the village WhatsApp group. Using a mobile app, the health worker identifies Kato's symptoms as serious and recommends them to visit a clinic. Nnaalongo's relative sends medical fees via mobile money, Kato is quickly diagnosed with malaria and then treated. This story illustrates the life-saving triad of connectivity, information, and financial inclusion.

Irrespective of a plethora of medical practitioners graduating every year, Uganda's healthcare workforce is still demanding. In 2020, the Journal of Global Health reported a doctor-patient ratio of 1:25,000 and a nurse-patient ratio of 1:11,000, far below the WHO's recommended 1:1,000. With

over 73% of our population living in rural areas and most doctors concentrated in urban centers, the gap in access is still worrying. However, technology offers a path across this chasm. Mobile penetration in Uganda now stands at 43.2 million subscriptions, creating a unique opportunity to deliver healthcare services directly into people's hands.

Wondering about how are we walking this new path? Here is where to start from. Telemedicine platforms now allow patients in Kaabong to consult doctors in Kampala, reducing the need for long and costly journeys. Those without smartphones can access care via USSD codes, such as \*280# and follow prompts.

The Ministry of Health's Self-CareUG app, accessible via Google PlayStore also helps individuals, families, and communities prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness, with or without a healthcare provider. Vital information on maternal health, nutrition, and HIV/AIDS is delivered in local languages, breaking down walls of ignorance and stigma.

Data analytics also enable predictive health interventions, allowing authorities to anticipate disease outbreaks and pre-position resources, a proactive approach, much like reading the clouds before a storm. Financial technology strengthens this system further. Currently, someone deep in the village can access

insurance services using Mobile Money to secure health coverage, pay premiums in instalments, directly from the phone.

However, technology alone is not the magic bullet. Systems must be built on human compassion, cultural understanding, and a relentless commitment to people. Frontline workers like the Community Health Worker who helped Nnaalongo remain the bedrock of our healthcare system. Technology empowers them to do more, know more, and reach far.

Challenges like limited internet access, digital literacy, and data privacy persist, but when we address them collaboratively, we can build a system where the first



**Paul Nagemi, Chief Health Officer, Prudential Uganda**

point of care is in your pocket, and wellness just a few clicks on your mobile device.

Let us all support innovators, adopt these solutions, and advocate for policies that foster digital transformation. Together, we can bridge healthcare gaps and stride forward as a healthier, more connected Uganda.