



INITIATIVE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

NO! WE DO NOT HAVE THAT DRUG NOW



**Community Voices: The Looming Threat of Drug stock-Out in Uganda's Public Health Facilities**

2024

# Executive Summary

In the heart of Uganda's public health facilities lies a deepening crisis that reverberates through the voices of its communities, particularly the poor and vulnerable. The echoes of desperation and frustration grow louder as stock-out of life saving medicines and supplies persist, casting a shadow on timely access to healthcare.

This compilation brings together a diversity of voices from various communities across Uganda where the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights has presence. Rooted in its Citizen Participation and Community Mobilization program, communities narrate their ordeal in navigating an understocked public healthcare system- leaving individuals grappling with uncertainty about when, or even if, life-saving medicines like coartem and paracetamol will be available again.

The poor and vulnerable segments of society disproportionately pay a higher price for drug stock-outs. Struggling to find a decent meal, they face a grim reality of abandoning prescriptions and resorting to local concoctions in the hope of saving life.

As we journey through these narratives, a stark truth emerges- sick people are compelled to skip treatment, even life-saving ones, when the out-of-pocket medication becomes a daunting challenge.

"No, We don't have that drug now" is a recurring theme echoed by various contributors.

Through "Community Voices, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights seeks to amplify the lived-experiences of those whose lives hang in a balance.

***Reclaiming Quality Public Health Services Together!***

Angella Kasule Nabwowe  
Ag. Executive Director

# Acknowledgments

Thank you to the named and anonymous contributors to this advocacy piece. Thank you for your collective and individual wisdom and for being willing to share your experiences and insights on drug stock-outs and how they impact equitable access to life-saving medicines in your community.

A special thank you to;

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# Introduction



In Uganda's public health system, a pressing concern demands our urgent action- persistent stock-outs of medicines and medical supplies. Its impact on the lives of ordinary citizens can no longer be ignored. This issue is partially attributed to inadequate budgetary allocations for medicines and the surging demands of a growing population. The implications are far-reaching as drug rationing becomes the order of the day, leading to drug resistance, and in worst scenarios, the unnecessary loss of lives. The need for timely supply and equitable distribution of needed drugs at public health facilities transcends mere healthcare logistics, it touches upon fundamental principles of social justice, health, and human rights.

 The issue of drug stock-out has made headlines in recent media outlets.



## Community struggles when essential medicines run out

In the grip of medicine stock-outs, a bitter reality unfolds for countless individuals, especially within low-income communities. Through their eyes, we witness the profound struggles of those navigating life without access to essential medicines. As health conditions worsen, and families bear a heavy financial burden of buying drugs from a private provider, the true extent of drug stock-outs becomes evident. Together, their voices echo an urgent call to action- make life-saving medicines accessible to everyone.



*"I am not certain whether I am simply unfortunate because everytime I visit the health center, I don't find drugs."*

*Resident, Nazigo Sub-county,  
Kayunga district*

“

As a health worker, it is heartbreaking to see a patient go without medicine. We are doing everything possible we can, but our hands are tied

Health Worker, Sigulu HCIII, Namayingo District

”



As a result, sick people skip treatment, even life saving treatment when it costs them too much out of pocket. Some individuals may seek alternatives such as herbal medicines, but the risk with these remedies is that they do not always work as effectively as prescribed drugs.





## Communities turn to old-age traditional herbs

When modern medicines are out of reach due to persistent drug stock-outs, and individuals especially in the low-resources communities cannot afford to buy drugs from a private drug shop, they turn to traditional herbs.



When individuals cannot afford the alternative choice of buying drugs from for-profit hospitals, they often abandon the prescribed medications in favor of local herbs, which may not always be effective or safe. This decision can be detrimental to their overall health and hinder their recovery process

"When my son had a fever, I couldn't afford the prescribed medication. My grandmother brewed for him a herbal concoction which he had to drink and bath."

Parent, Ngero Sub-County,  
Kumi District

## ▶ Health becomes a choice at a great opportunity cost



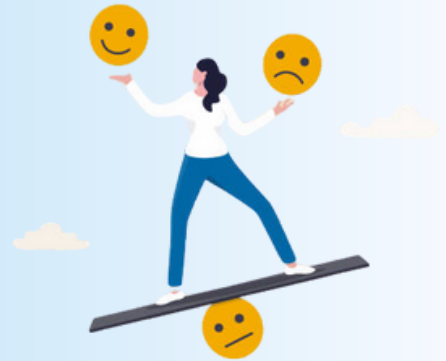
In the harsh reality of drug stockouts, individuals find themselves caught in an agonizing dilemma - a choice between essential medicines and meeting their basic needs for survival.

“

"The nurse wrote for me the prescription and advised that I buy the medicine from outside. I am a widow without any source of income. I am unable to buy medicine and also buy food."

Buwanja Village , Nasuma Parish,  
Namayingo District

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When individuals are compelled to exceed their financial capabilities, they resort to taking loans to support themselves. However, it raises the question of why a tax-paying population, which contributes to the government revenue on almost all fronts, should be driven to such drastic measures.

“

I sometimes have to borrow money from the women's saving SACCO. But my child suffers a chronic illness which needs medicine all the time. Sometimes I have to wait for my children in Dubai to send money. But it is very straining in times of emergency.

”

# Call to Action!



We are dying!!!

THERE ARE NO  
DRUGS IN HEALTH  
CENTERS

Fulfil your  
pledges  
stock public  
healthcare  
facilities!"

Drug stock-  
outs cost  
lives

Healthcare is a  
right, not a  
luxury.

Invest in health,  
invest in our  
future!!!

Medicines save lives, stock our  
health facilities.

Make essential  
medicines available  
and accessible to  
all!

Healthcare shouldn't  
depend on luck. Supply  
medicines now!