

# JMS thrives on innovation – Baguma

The Catholic and Anglican churches in Uganda formed the Joint Medical Store (JMS) in 1979. From humble beginnings JMS has grown to become the leading private provider of pharmaceutical products in Uganda. The executive director, Dr Bildard Baguma, in an interview with *New Vision's* Umar Nsubuga, takes us through their 40-year journey

**Q** What has helped JMS to grow over the last 40 years?

We highly cherish professionalism. We believe that there are no shortcuts to success, but rather hard work and professionalism day in, day out. We also put rigorous attention to quality and detail, as well as collaborations with our colleagues, both locally and internationally.

Manufacturing processes and know-how for all the products we deal in. Another factor is the continuous training and mentoring of our staff. These have been pivotal in the JMS growth.

**How would you describe the contribution of JMS to the health sector?**

JMS is playing a big role in the health sector, in our first decade, the focus was on getting medicines and sending

them all over the country. However, it was soon realised that health facilities also lacked functional equipment. To address the need, a medical equipment department was established in 1981. Ten years later, the pharmaceutical market was facing another hurdle; this time, the cost of importing supplies was very high, we set up a production unit and we have started manufacturing. Our standard, leadership and governance contribute a lot to the health sector.

**What makes JMS different?**

JMS has an experienced, dedicated management, guided by values of responsibility, agility, respect, excellence, join hands, measure everything and specific and responsive actions. Every day, we work hard to give service to Ugandans. We started manufacturing medical

sundries in order to boost the economy and ensure affordability of the health services.

We pledge to continue working harmoniously with the Catholic and Anglican bishops and the health ministry to ensure that people all over the country get quality drugs. We do quality assurance to ensure that the drugs are not counterfeit; that drugs are manufactured and distributed in the right way also makes us different.

The store items are regularly inspected because pharmaceutical products are sensitive to environmental changes.

**Tell us about your customers?**

JMS serves different classes of customers. They handle stock on behalf of donors, referred to as third party, then their customers, who are divided into health facilities, non-governmental organisations and church-based institutions. We have representatives in different parts of the country, who collect orders from different facilities. This is done through the JMS outlets in Masaka, Jinja, Fort Portal, as well as



Joint Medical Store executive director Dr Bildard Baguma

the branches in Kampala, Arua and recently, Mbarara. Deliveries to the different regions are governed by a strict schedule.

**What is the scale of your operations?**

Currently, we have branches in Kampala, Arua and the newly opened one in Mbarara. However, we have outlets in different districts under their respective dioceses. These include Masaka under the Masaka Diocese, Fort Portal under the Fort Portal Diocese, Arua under the Arua Diocese and we are soon opening branches Mbale and Gulu.

**What are some of the challenges you face?**

JMS also has a mandate to provide training and other forms of capacity building, especially for accredited health units. The areas we are conversant with are logistics management and managing of the supply chain to ensure that the health units are efficient in their work.

**How are you addressing the challenge of counterfeits?**

The scope of counterfeiting is so big and worse in the case of counterfeit medicines. As JMS, we work for quality because our patients are unaware that there are many counterfeit medicines. Globally, counterfeiting results in huge losses in tax revenue. There are unscrupulous businessmen who do not care about the quality of drugs they sell. In most cases they will sell the drugs cheaply.

As JMS we deliver

pharmaceutical products at the doorstep of our customers, that's why we are different.

**How are you mitigating these challenges?**

JMS embraces total quality management and is committed to providing quality pharmaceutical and other healthcare products, as well as capacity building and biomedical equipment services to its customers consistently, efficiently and in a timely, courteous, professional and value-added manner.

**What kind of support do you need from the government or donors?**

We would want the government to increase on the funding because we contribute a lot to the economy of Uganda.

**How do you plan to sustain the new projects you hope to introduce?**

JMS is a trusteeship, non-profit organisation, but we are growing. We have started to manufacture our own drugs, which is threatening to be a huge health challenge.

We want to expand our capacity to meet the healthcare challenges of the future. But amid taking on all these developments, the assurance I can give to everyone out there is that we will never ever compromise the quality of our products.

We are, therefore, looking at investing in the future; through trainings, technology among others. We want to ensure that people have a sustainable access to newer,

safer and affordable quality medicines by continuously innovating and adding more product lines to meet the needs of our customers.

**Why should pharmaceutical warehouses be custom-made?**

Most pharmaceutical products need to be kept under specific conditions, which, if not adhered to, can lead to loss of efficacy of the product to treat what they are supposed to treat. Therefore, these warehouses are temperature controlled and monitored; should there be any changes, collective action is taken. The physical condition is also crucial.

**What plans do you have for JMS?**

We are still trying hard to expand our markets to reach our customers, we are currently in three districts Kampala, Arua and Mbarara we also have warehouses in Jinja, Masaka and Fort Portal. Soon we are going to have branches in Mbale and Gulu, and we believe that ten years from now, our market should have grown in most of the districts in Uganda.

We are also looking at integrating and starting to manufacture different drugs by setting up an active pharmaceutical ingredient plant.

We are also looking at increasing on our product range. We have already manufactured drugs such as Replenish++, we also plan to continue supporting the health services.

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**Joint Medical Stores (JMS) has been instrumental in the procurement of locally manufactured medicines under the BUBU initiative.**

**Rene is committed to supporting JMS's mission to effectively and efficiently supply essential medicines to health facilities in Uganda. We wish you all the success in the future!**

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