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## COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

#### **MAKERERE UNIVERSITY CONTRIBUTES TO IMPROVED HEALTH SERVICE UTILISATION IN UGANDA**

The Makerere University College of Health Sciences' Community Based Education and Services (COBES) has immensely contributed to addressing health inequities between rural and urban communities in Uganda. COBES is an initiative where Makerere medical students are placed to work in rural communities for a period of time.

With simple innovative strategies, students have been able to solve some of the most common health problems in these communities as illustrated here;

"In academic year 2010/2011, the cattle keepers in Bwizibwera, Mbarara district, experienced a water availability problem; students came up with a cheap water harvesting system. It was made out of mud, sticks (wood) and iron sheets to make the underground water tank. In Jinja at Rippon landing site, the major problem was prevalent Bilharzia due to the continued deposition of waste into the lake and lack of basic knowledge about the disease. Students did a sensitisation campaign, and assessment done before and after the sensitisation showed an increase in the knowledge about Bilharzia".

Through this approach to education, the College of Health Sciences has built partnerships with communities and built their capacity to identify and address community health problems. The COBES programme is also one way the College is addressing the acute problem of health workers' shortages in the country especially in the rural areas.

“With placement of students at rural health centres under COBES, the human resource gaps are addressed; the workload reduces, giving health workers time to read and study; interaction with the patients improves, as well as the image of the health facility”, said Dr. Andrew Mwanika, COBES Chair and Coordinator.

According to assessments done, utilisation of health centres by the community members improves by 20%-30% during the time when students are doing their COBES activities at the health centres.

Dr. Mwanika further said the attitude of the students to rural health sites has also changed positively with many of them eventually getting employed by the districts. “COBES is an opportunity for the students to get exposed to experiential and practical learning, as well as to employment opportunities by the districts where they are placed”, he added.

However, all these achievements have been registered on a limited budget. With added support from the government, students, communities, health facilities, districts as well as the University, could reap more from COBES.

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