

The case for establishment of HIV/AIDs Trust Fund

EDITOR: The *New Vision* recently published an article stating that MPs want the AIDS Trust Fund (ATF) established this financial year.

This was largely driven by the fact that the law was passed in 2014 providing for the fund to generate money locally to finance campaigns the fight against HIV/AIDs especially through addressing the Anti-Retroviral (ARV) stock outs in health facilities. The ATF would also reduce Uganda's dependence on development partners to finance efforts towards reducing HIV/AIDs epidemic.

The ATF is nothing new, and within Africa, countries such as Zimbabwe and Tanzania have already embarked on a similar journey. In fact, Zimbabwe's National AIDS Trust Fund (AIDS Levy) is often seen as a good model for others countries to follow and has generated over \$38.6m in 2016 alone. At least 50% of the funds raised annually, by policy are used to purchase ARVs.

This is quite commendable considering the political and economic challenges the country has suffered in the recent years.

Drawing from the Zimbabwe and Tanzania experience, when well set up, the benefits of an ATF are extensive. Some consideration for fund set-up would be ensuring independence of the ATF from political stakeholder decisions to avoid interference because of their opinions.

The money would be raised through levies charged on commodities or workers' income and collected on a separate account. A board would be selected to advise the operations of the ATF and competent staff are hired to run it. The funds raised would be used to purchase ARVS, condoms, kits and continuous sensitisation of citizens, and the funds accounted for accordingly.

The above notwithstanding, strong systems and governance are critical to the running of the fund and full transparency is necessary to allow for dealing with issues that may arise. In some of the funds operating around us, there have been complaints over the skill level or competency of the people running the fund.

Having a national fund also reduces on duplicated fund raising efforts towards HIV/AIDs prevention

and treatment and allows for a more central system of collecting and managing the funds.

The development partners supporting HIV/AIDs in Uganda have, for a long time committed resources to help in the fight against HIV LAIDS. However, we must remember that the money they provide comes from taxpayers in their countries and fatigue comes in quickly thus raising uncertainty over fund allocation for specific causes. In recent years, we have witnessed shifts in donor funding priorities for different African countries including Uganda. As such, having an HIV AIDs trust fund helps reduce on this dependability and allows for resources from development partners to be channelled to other areas. In some cases, it also leads to generation of more funds since the development partners are now happy that there is a transparent mechanism in place for the raising of funds for HIV/AIDs fight.

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