



Gen. Ali (right) and Mungherera during the International Men's Day celebrations in Kampala yesterday. Ali advised men to go for HIV testing. Photo by Abou Kisige

Men frustrate fight against HIV/AIDS

By Abou Kisige

Men's refusal to test for HIV/AIDS is hindering the Government's efforts in the fight against the disease, the First Deputy Prime Minister, Gen. Moses Ali, has said.

"The health-seeking behaviour of men is poor and as a nation, we need to engage men and boys as partners to fight the HIV scourge," he said.

Ali said getting more men to go for testing and knowing their status will help the Government link men into treatment and care services.

He made the remarks during celebrations to mark the International Men's Day in Kampala. The celebrations were aimed at highlighting the role of actively involving men and boys as equal partners in promoting a healthy nation.

The day was organised by Mamas' Club Uganda and celebrated under the theme: "Engaging men and boys for a healthy nation."

Ali said according to available data at the Ministry of Health, only 45% of men go for HIV testing. He said there are more men than women suffering from tuberculosis.

He added that engaging men and boys should be deliberate to enlist their support and ensure their participation.

"The engagement of men and boys is critical for an effective AIDS response, given the social-cultural and stereotypical views of women, men, boys and girls," Ali said.

He said men's responsibility for children and care of their families is key to HIV prevention and their involvement in mitigating the effects of the AIDS epidemic.

"It is indeed important for men to work together with women for gender equality,



BETWEEN THE LINES:

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question harmful practices of masculinity and end all forms of violence against women," Ali said.

He said there is need to galvanise all district and community leaders to call upon men to be good role models and support their partners.

"We need to promote couple counselling and testing and linking couples to care and treatment services," the deputy Premier Minister said.

He lauded cultural and religious leaders, especially the Kabaka of Buganda, Ronald Muwenda Mutebi, the Kyabazinga of Busoga, William Gabula Nadiope, and the Omukama of Toro, Oyo Nyimba Kabamba Iguru, for being goodwill ambassadors by highlighting the role of men in fighting the scourge.

The director general of the Uganda AIDS Commission, Dr Nelson Masoba, noted that progress has been made. He, however, said the burden of

HIV infection in the country is still high.

He said prevention, awareness creation and treatment is needed especially for the young people and men.

Masoba said recent results call for concerted efforts from all stakeholders to scale up evidence-based interventions for sustainable HIV control.

"To fix this gap, we need more stakeholders and rejuvenated efforts, including effective representation, advocacy and co-ordination," Masoba said.

He said in response to the current challenges, the commission is fast-tracking President Yoweri Museveni's directive to end AIDS as a public health threat in Uganda by 2030.

Masoba said all government ministries, departments and agencies, development partners, civil society and all stakeholders are being involved in implementing the initiative by involving men and boys to reduce new HIV infections.

The executive director of Mama's Club Uganda, Dr. Lydia Mungherera, said increasing the number of men tested will make Uganda realise the UN 90-90-90 targets.

According to the target, 90% of all people HIV will receive sustained anti-retroviral therapy by 2020.

By 2020, 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will have viral suppression and by 2020, 90% of all people living with HIV will know their status.

The Uganda Population-Based HIV Impact Assessment conducted from August 2016 to March 2017 indicates a national prevalence rate of 7.3%.