EMPLOYERS URGED TO PROTECT WORKERS FROM HIV

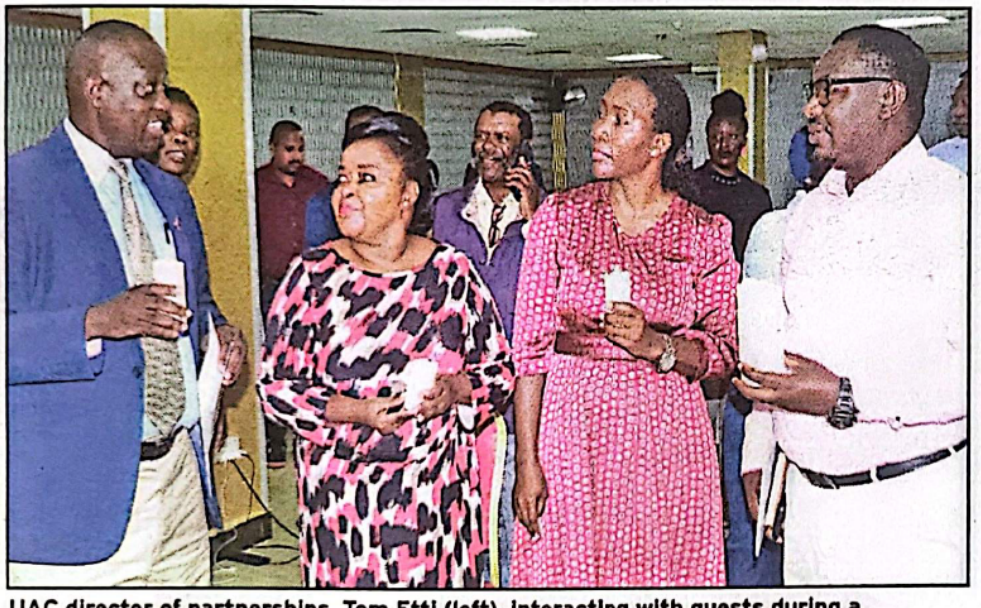
By Agnes Kyotalengerire

Private sector companies have been urged to strengthen workplace measures aimed at protecting employees, especially young women, from the risk of acquiring HIV.

Dr Vincent Bagambe, the director of planning and strategic information at the Uganda AIDS Commission (UAC), said some businesses expose young workers to risky environments in pursuit of profits.

He cited bars, hotels and entertainment establishments where young women are employed as attendants, but later end up engaging in commercial sex work, increasing their vulnerability to HIV infection.

He was speaking on Tuesday during a meeting between UAC officials and representatives of private sector companies at Hotel Africana in Kampala. The meeting aimed at introducing new guidelines for mainstreaming HIV and AIDS interventions in workplaces as part of Uganda's strategy to end AIDS by 2030.



UAC director of partnerships, Tom Etti (left), interacting with guests during a meeting between UAC officials and representatives of private sector companies

The engagement attracted participants from the Uganda Fish Processors and Exporters Association, the Tea and Sugar Manufacturing Association, the Uganda Small Scale Industries Association (USSIA), construction companies, performing arts groups, horticulture firms, banks, hotels and health sector players.

Dr Bagambe said the private sector remains critical in reaching young people with HIV prevention information, especially at a time when donor funding for HIV programmes is shrinking.

According to the 2025 national HIV estimates, Uganda registered 37,000 new HIV infections in 2024, translating into an additional treatment and care cost of about sh25.9b. Young people aged between 15 and 24 accounted for 14,000 of those infections, representing 45% of the total.

Of these, adolescent girls and young women contributed 11,000 cases, equivalent to 78%, compared to 3,000 infections among their male counterparts.

The Government currently spends about sh910b annually on treatment and care for the 1.3 million Ugandans living with HIV/AIDS.

"Companies need workplace policies, including resources to fund activities within their entities and the communities they serve," the UAC director of partnerships, Tom Etti, said.

According to UAC, Uganda records about 711 new HIV infections every week, equivalent to nearly five infections every hour.

Private sector representatives welcomed the partnership with UAC, saying it would strengthen workplace HIV prevention efforts.

Stella Namaganda, the HIV/AIDS and gender co-ordinator at Dott Services Ltd, said the company has already integrated HIV interventions into its operations through community outreaches, counselling and testing programmes.

William Tibyasa, the chief executive officer of the Uganda Fish Processors and Exporters Association, described the engagement as timely, noting that HIV prevalence in fishing communities remains high at 24%.

"To end AIDS by 2030, there is a need for sector-specific interventions because the needs of each sector differ," Tibyasa said.

CamScanner