

# 500,000 more people to receive free HIV treatment

By Francis Kagolo

The Global Fund has provided \$478m (sh1.7 trillion), which will enable over 370,000 more Ugandans living with HIV get free drugs from government health facilities for the next three years.

The Government, with this and other funding, will enroll another 180,000 people annually on free treatment, bringing the number to 540,000 in the next three years, according to Dr Joshua Musinguzi, the Ministry of Health HIV/AIDS programme manager.

This is \$57m more than they provided in the last funding cycle ending next month. It is also the biggest the fund has ever disbursed to an African country, according to Prime Minister Dr Ruhakana Rugunda.

"This is a sign of confidence development partners have in Uganda," Rugunda said as he presided over the grant signing ceremony at Hotel Africana in Kampala yesterday. The Prime Minister implored the Ministry of Health and other implementing partners to ensure the funds are invested in the intended areas and accounted for promptly.

HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment campaigns took the lion's share of the grant, followed by malaria and tuberculosis (TB). The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO) is the only non-governmental agency benefitting from the grant to address TB/HIV co-infections and malaria. TASO is also to support other civil society organisations to provide care to key HIV/AIDS affected populations. The grant also includes emergency funds for refugees for the period of 2018-2020.

Currently, 70% of Ugandans living with HIV/AIDS who get drugs (ARVs) from government health facilities are supported by the Global Fund, according to Dr. Musinguzi.

This is about 480,000 of the estimated 686,000 people getting ARVs from government health facilities. The new funding means they will also continue getting the medicines from government health facilities countrywide until 2020, when the next grant negotiations are slated to take place.

Private and other non-governmental charity facilities supported mainly by the US government, are treating the remaining people living with HIV to make the over one million Ugandans currently on ARVs.

The Government implemented the 'treat-and-test' policy this year, with medics required to give free ARVs to every person that tests positive to HIV, irrespective of their level of sickness (CD4 cell count). With more support from other development partners.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB



Wijnroks (left) and the state minister of finance for planning, David Bahati (right) at Hotel Africana yesterday. Photo by Kennedy Oryema

### HIV

- Boost HIV prevention, specifically among 15-24 year-old girls.
- Reduce the number of new youth and adult infections by 70%.
- Reduce new children infections by 95% by 2020.
- Decrease sickness and deaths by 70%.
- Achieve 90% viral suppression.

### Malaria

- Distribute 17,119,564 nets
- Train 630 health workers
- Reduce malaria parasite prevalence to less than 7%
- Deaths reduced to near zero.

### TB

- Incidence reduced by 5% by 2019/20.
- Ninety-five percent treatment for TB/HIV co-infected patients.
- Increase case detection of drug-resistant TB from 17% in 2015 to 51% in 2020.

### OTHER 2020 TARGETS

and malaria is an international financing organisation that aims to attract and disburse additional resources to prevent and treat the three diseases.

Since its inception in Uganda in 2002,

### New Global Fund grants

GRANT	AMOUNT (US\$)
Govt (HIV)	245,570,664
Govt (TB)	18,445,026
Govt (Malaria)	171,724,213
TASO (TB/HIV)	14,347,607
TASO (Malaria)	14,969,534

the fund has extended free grants to the tune of \$1b, contributing to achievements such as the improved TB cure rate from 30% to 50% through the installation of high-tech GeneXpert machines used for TB diagnosis in various health facilities countrywide.

Malaria prevalence has also reduced from over 40% to 17% as of 2014, thanks to interventions such as mass distribution of long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets. This year, the health ministry reported a reduction in HIV prevalence from 7.3% five years ago to 6.1%.

Dr Marijk Wijnroks, the interim Global Fund executive director, commended Uganda for the positive strides against the three diseases and called for the proper implementation of the new funds to achieve better results.

The US ambassador to Uganda, Deborah Malac and the chairperson of the Uganda AIDS Commission, Prof. Edward Kirumira, called for increased Government funding for HIV/AIDS to bridge the estimated \$415m gap.

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