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Sustain HIV/AIDS financing

If the current efforts in local resource mobilisation for HIV and AIDS work in Uganda are sustained, the country will very soon be able to provide quality drugs and interventions to all those that need them making our target of ending AIDS by 2030 achievable.

HIV programmes in Uganda remain largely funded by donors, but going forward, they will increasingly have to be funded through domestic sources.

Recent records show that although the Government has been increasing its contribution to the epidemic, more than 68% comes from AIDS development partners, 20% families, 11% from the Government and 1% from the private sector.

Currently, the rising HIV programme costs to meet increased treatment targets as the HIV epidemic matures within a shrinking donor support for HIV is a reality for many low and middle income countries. The key question is: How can sustainable funding towards HIV be guaranteed in light of competing public priorities, substantial current investments towards HIV and a backdrop of declining external funding towards HIV?

The Uganda AIDS Commission, working with key stakeholders, has developed a resource mobilisation strategy that proposes various approaches to mobilising local resources including;

- increased government allocation for health and HIV/AIDS,
- innovative approaches like levies,
- efficiency savings by exercising frugality with available resources and
- development partner contributions.

In order to respond to these domestic financing challenges, Parliament in July 2014 passed an HIV and AIDS prevention and Control Act which provides for the establishment of the AIDS Trust Fund. The purpose of the fund is to secure a predictable and sustainable means of procuring goods and services for HIV and AIDS counseling, testing and treatment.

The monies of the fund shall consist of:

- Two percent of the total tax revenue collected from levies on beers, spirits or waragi, soft drinks and bottled water;
- Tax revenue from any other taxable item as may be identified by the minister responsible for finance from time to time;
- Grants, monies or assets donated to the fund through the minister responsible for finance or assets donated to the fund by any foreign government, international agency or external body of persons, corporate or unincorporated or
- Money received by the fund by way of voluntary contributions.

The regulations are currently being reviewed by Parliament and once approved will provide a basis for operationalising the fund.

Apart from the AIDS Trust Fund, the private sector in Uganda recently launched their strategy of raising local resources for HIV and AIDS work – the One Dollar Initiative. The initiative is now mobilising businesses and individuals to raise local resources as the only sustainable way of supplementing Government's efforts in this sector. We all need to be reminded that fighting HIV is not a charity action, but an investment; this is why both the private sector and the Government must share responsibility as a public good. We need to be reminded that ongoing efforts in funds mobilisation for HIV and AIDS work can no longer be sufficient without parallel positive results and increased efficiency in their use. Improving efficiency is about preventing new infections and saving more lives by doing the right things for the right populations, as well as delivering quality services at the lowest cost.

A new efficiency study is soon to be released showing that considerable resources spent on HIV and AIDS work are still being wasted through leakages, inefficient combinations of interventions and sub-optimal use of medicines and human resources. Efficiency savings to maximise the use of available resources will be adopted to demonstrate the HIV subsector can offer value for money in a resource-limited setting.

Increased attention needs to be placed on prioritising those interventions with proven effectiveness resulting in the best patient and population-level outcomes within the resources available. Through the recent Presidential Fast Track Initiative on AIDS, the President seeks to ensure "value for money" work ethic in the way both domestic and international funds are allocated and spent – thereby freeing up resources identified from efficiency gains and re-investing them in critical and prioritised programmes that will be enable Uganda to have an AIDS-free generation by 2030.

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