

THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN FIRST LADIES AGAINST HIV AND AIDS (OAFLA UG)

Report of the HIV Public Testing Event for National Leaders



***Held at Kiswa Health Center III
Kampala***

6th November 2013

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1.0 Background

The trend of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Uganda is a cause for concern with the HIV prevalence rate currently standing at 7.3 percent, up from 6.4 percent in 2005. This is particularly significant since Uganda once earned a global reputation for the exceptional political will displayed by the President, who acknowledged the alarming HIV prevalence rate that stood at 18% in 1992. Through President Museveni's nationwide campaigns coupled with the ABC Strategy, the rate was remarkably reduced to 6.4 % in 2005.

Today with approximately 130,000 new infections annually Uganda is faced with an infection rate that is on the rise and the challenge of ensuring that the nation meets the Millennium Development Goal on halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015 and achieving universal coverage of the HIV/AIDS testing target by 2015.

The HIV Public Testing event by the President of Uganda and other national leaders held on 8th November 2013, was therefore organized by OAFLA UG to promote the testing of HIV for all Ugandans; this being a first step towards curbing the spread of the Virus and MTCT. Since it is believed that knowledge of one's status is an effective strategy for behavioral change and the channel through which those infected can be encouraged to obtain care, treatment and other supportive services.

The event was attended by Government Officials, Development Partners, Civil Society and some members of the general public who were all offered the opportunity to participate in the VCT services that were offered on the premises of the Kiswa Health Center IV.

2.0 Remarks made by Dignitaries at the Event

2.1 Remarks by the Executive Director OAFLA Uganda

The Executive Director OAFLA Uganda Mrs. Beat Bisangwa, welcomed H.E the President to Kiswa and thanked him for being a role model, leading the way for the men of Uganda to do HIV Testing. She gave a brief background to the Awareness Campaigns on EMTCT and the National Response to HIV/AIDs, stating that the Public HIV Testing event is one amongst several HIV/AIDS sensitisation activities being conducted at a regional level around Uganda.

She recognized the First Lady for the key role she has played since she was nominated EMTCT Champion in 2012. She also expressed her gratitude to the UAC, the Ministry of Health, the KCCA, Implementing Partners and all the Development Partners who have

worked hard and shown their continued commitment to achieving an HIV Free Generation.

Mrs. Beat Bisangwa explained that *the objective of the Public HIV Counseling and Testing is to demonstrate to all Ugandans the importance of knowing their HIV status as an action towards increasing accessibility to the existing health services and promoting behavioral change, as a means of achieving an HIV-free generation.* The expected outcome is up to 70% Ugandans testing, knowing their status and taking relevant responsible action.

She concluded her remarks by expressing her appreciation to all the key national leaders who had offered to join the President in conducting the Public HIV Testing, pointing out that their participation symbolizes the Government's political commitment and will to eliminating the virus from Uganda.

2.2 Remarks by the Executive Director Kampala Capital City Authority

The Executive Director KCCA Mrs. Jennifer Musisi, welcomed the gathering to Kiswa Health Center IV which she said is one of the 10 Health Centers managed by KCCA in Kampala. She welcomed H.E. the President saying his presence is a very strong message on the importance of the need for every Ugandan to have VCT.

She spoke about the work KCCA is involved in as part of the National Response to HIV/AIDS, stating that the Authority has reached over 180,000 people in sensitization and counseling and made the Option B+ strategy free, since December 2012. KCCA has also targeted and reached the Most at Risk Population including boda boda riders, fishermen, truck drivers and the youth. Additionally, EMTCT services and Safe Male Circumcision are offered free of charge at all the KCCA Health facilities. She observed that there is still a very low up take of these services and encouraged the people of Kampala to take advantage of these services and facilities, noting that it is everyone's duty to work towards an HIV Free Generation.

Mrs. Musisi appealed to all the city dwellers to embrace HIV Testing to know their status, saying that KCCA is committed to the fight against HIV.

2.3 Remarks by the Chairman Uganda AIDS Commission (UAC)

Dr. Nantulya the Chairperson of the UAC said Uganda is now in a better position to contain HIV. He pointed out that *“Every Ugandan has the responsibility to eliminate HIV. We need not been forced to do this it is our responsibility to test. We have a*

target for every Ugandan to be tested, we have the tools to do this country wide, all we need is the participation of everyone”

He thanked the President for his commitment towards an HIV Free Generation observing that the Presidents presence demonstrates the importance of standing up and taking the test.

He explained that people who have tested are less likely to get infected and less likely to infect their loved ones. While those who learn early that they are HIV positive, will get the care and treatment they need, which will improve their quality of life. Furthermore any pregnant woman who tests HIV positive will be given treatment and assisted to have an HIV-free baby. *“Testing for HIV together as a couple will help a couple to support each other, and if one is HIV positive and another is negative, the negative person will be assisted to remain negative”* he said.

Dr. Nantulya closed his remarks by reminding the gathering that in addition to HIV counseling and testing, other HIV prevention methods are critical to reducing the spread of HIV, including: delaying first sex, abstinence, being faithful, correct and consistent condom use, testing for HIV when pregnant to eliminate mother-to-child transmission, safe male circumcision, and antiretroviral therapy to reduce new HIV infections. He urged them to take advantage of these services and to encourage other Ugandans to do the same.

2.4 Remarks by the Minister of State for Health (General Duties)

The Minister of Health General Duties, Hon. Elioda Tumwesigye on behalf of the Ministry of Health, welcomed H.E to Kiswa Health Center IV and thanked him for his commitment towards Uganda’s battle against HIV/AIDS. He noted that millions of lives were saved between the late 1980s and the 1990s by the Presidents efforts when he stood his ground and sensitized the nation about HIV/AIDS, at a time when most African countries were reluctant to do so.

Dr. Elioda Tumwesigye explained that while the HIV prevalence in Uganda has risen from 6.4 to 7.3 percent, the MOH has conducted several programmes that have seen the new infections reduced compared to 2009. He was happy to note that in the past few months the number of people on treatment had risen above the number who are getting new infections and congratulated all the stakeholders on this achievement. He thanked the First Lady and Champion of EMTC in absentia, for her efforts to bring down the likelihood of infection of children through her regional campaigns on EMTCT.

Dr. Elioda informed the gathering that the Government of Uganda has committed over 100 billion shillings to ensure the availability of ARVs for those who are on treatment. He explained that in a bid to demonstrate further political will, today the national

leadership is demonstrating the importance of HIV Testing by leading by example. He urged Ugandans to test and know their status and become a part of the 15 million Ugandans targeted for HIV Testing by 2014.

He expressed his appreciation to OAFLA, KCCA the UAC and all the other partners who have continued to provide leadership in promoting VCT. *“Saving a life is the most noble task, there is nothing as precious as saving life”* he said.

2.5 Remarks by H.E the President of Uganda

H.E. the President of Uganda Lt. General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, spoke of a Kinyankore proverb that says: *“If you decide to hide meat from the fire, where will you roast it from?”*

He elaborated on the relevance of the proverb saying *“Likewise HIV testing is in your own interests. If you test and are negative avoid risky behavior, if you are positive start using ARVs because they are now available. Carelessness for short term satisfaction is not wise. Health is wealth and healthy people are productive”* he said.

H.E. the President pointed out that AIDS is largely a behavior disease that is not contracted like malaria. AIDS is mainly transmitted through sex. In the past the Virus was transmitted through using used needles and instruments, circumcision knives and blood transfusion, however measures have been taken to address these and now the main channel of infection is through sex and Mother to Child Transmission (MTCT).

He concluded by calling upon parents, teachers, all political, religious, cultural, and community leaders as well as the media in Uganda, to urge Ugandans to test for HIV and to seek advice and care from a health facility. *“Men should also be encouraged to get actively involved in the health of their families”* he said.

The HIV Testing of the President took less than 5 minutes and was followed by the testing of other dignitaries some of whom tested with their spouses namely: the Minister of Health General Duties Hon. Elioda Tumwesigye, Members of Parliament from the Sessional Committee on HIV/AIDS, the Executive Director KCCA, Mrs. Jennifer Musisi, the NRM Vice Chairman, Eastern Uganda, Capt. Mike Mukula, some representatives from the UPDF and Bishop Lwere of the National Fellowship of Born Again Christians.

Witnessing the Public HIV Testing by H.E the President of Uganda

After his remarks, H.E. the President flanked by the Minister of Health for General Duties Hon. Elioda Tumwesigye, stepped over to the tent in front of the Health Center.

After being counseled by his personal physician, he had his blood sample taken, amidst a lot of pomp and ululation by the general public.

2.6 VOTE OF THANKS BY THE UNAIDS COUNTRY COORDINATOR:

The event then ended with a vote of thanks by the Country Director UNAIDS Mr. Musa Bungudu. Mr. Bungudu drew the Presidents attention to the fact that the rise in new infections is stretching the ability of the Government and donors to provide HIV and AIDS treatment. Currently over 500,000 Ugandans need AIDS treatment, many accessing it through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund. He pointed out that if Uganda succeeds in testing the targeted 15 million Ugandans by 2014, it is estimated that at least 400,000 more people will be in need of AIDS treatment; thus requiring further resources to meet the need.

He recognized the UAC, the MOH as well as OAFLA for their unwavering commitment towards the Campaign to support EMTCT and the elimination of HIV/AIDS in Uganda. He urged the national leadership to continue promoting the importance of HIV Testing at all levels pointing out that the MPs as well as Cultural and Religious leaders should set the same example in their constituencies.

He expressed the gratitude of the Executive Director UNAIDS to the President, saying he appreciates his commitment to lead by example.

3.0 CONCLUSION:

The Activity was successfully carried out, with the objective achieved and the assurance that the outcome of up to 70% of Ugandans testing in the coming year will be obtained. This will help in the management of the scourge and in bringing down the rate of new infections. We recognize and appreciate UNFPA and CDC for having supported this activity.