

NHAS BACKGROUND

Uganda AIDS Commission (UAC) and partners developed the National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan (NSP) 2020/2021 – 2024/25 to guide implementation of the HIV and AIDS multi-sectoral response and align HIV and AIDS interventions to the key drivers of the epidemic and other key national development plans. The NSP is aligned to the third National Development Plan (NDP III) and provides overall strategic direction for the national response under four broad thematic areas: (i) prevention, (ii) care and treatment, (iii) social support and protection, and (iv) systems strengthening.

To operationalize the NSP, UAC and partners developed a National Priority Action Plan (NPAP), which articulates activities by stakeholders for each strategic action. The NPAP spells out output results, time frame, and lead sectors for implementation of strategic actions. The M&E plan for the NSP lays out a framework for tracking and evaluating the interventions. UAC also worked with partners to develop the National HIV and AIDS Research Agenda 2020/2021 – 2024/2025. UAC therefore organizes the Annual National HIV and AIDS Scientific Meeting to provide a platform for programmers and scientists to discuss progress and challenges in implementation of the research agenda and the HIV response generally, and to dialogue on solutions to the challenges.

Since 2020, the Annual JAR and the Annual National HIV and AIDS Scientific meeting have been organized together as the National HIV and AIDS Symposium (NHAS) to leverage resources for both events. The NHAS 2022 occurred in an open space setting at Makerere University Business School in Nakawa, Kampala. The meeting combined the Scientific Meeting, the JAR presentation, the Philly Lutaya Memorial Lecture and associated events, the Financing Dialogue, and The Partnership Forum. The meeting was successful, was attended by many high-level participants, and had substantial community participation. The total number of registered participants was 1,400. The invitation of PLO Lumumba to deliver the Key Note Speech for the Financing Dialogue attracted some participants to the meeting. Renowned gospel artist, Pastor Wilson Bugembe (Philly Lutaaya Memorial Lecture) gave a moving address about HIV and AIDS and how it

impacted his family. There were also some lessons learned. The Philly Lutaaya Memorial events could become more integrated with the rest of the activities. Some technical presentations were interrupted by guest arrivals. Scientific presentations were solicited from targeted presenters; there was no competitive submission and evaluation of abstracts.

Scientific and programming issues, which emerged at the NHAS 2022, and were marked as requiring attention, include: complacency about HIV and AIDS among community members, especially young people; targeted testing missing some HIV positives; punitive laws and policies limiting access to services among vulnerable groups; increased mother to child transmission rates; reduced retention and viral suppression rates; high rates of HIV transmission among adolescent girls and young women (15-24) and among men aged 25-35; limited dissemination and utilization of research findings; the need to mainstream HIV in the Parish Development Model; limited coverage of economic empowerment programs for vulnerable populations; funding of HIV activities in local governments; and the need for efficiency in programming.

NHAS 2023 will draw from the successes and lessons of NHAS 2022, aim to prevent some of the challenges encountered, and attempt to include the highlighted scientific and programming issues into the scientific program. The NHAS 2023 will feature: the JAR presentation, the Scientific Meeting, Financing Dialogue, the Phily Lutaya Memorial Lecture, and the National HIV and AIDS Exhibition. For the scientific meeting, we will issue a call for abstracts, and we will distribute presentations into plenary, breakout, and poster sessions. We will still identify and invite key note speakers. We will deliberately involve the UAC self-coordinating entities in organizing and implementing NHAS 2023. In particular, we will ask members of the youth constituency to assist with organizing and to perform tasks such as: publicity, protocol, technology, time keeping, and organizing for plenary and breakout sessions. We will evaluate and consider one or more of the following groups for this purpose: Young Positives, Uganda National Young Positives Association, Uganda National Students Association, Makerere University Environmental Health Science Students Association, MUBS Students Association, Kyambogo Students Association, National Youth Council, among others).

NHAS 2023 will build into World AIDS Day (WAD) 2023. For example, collaborations with SCEs established for NHAS 2023 will be leveraged to promote the active participation of SCEs in WAD

2023. Important new data and information from NHAS 2023 will be shared on WAD 2023. Also, pre-events for NHAS 2023 e.g., regional symposia, media campaigns, publicity events, regional concerts, etc., will be leveraged to build into WAD 2023. Awards for outstanding performance in the HIV response which will be part of NHAS 2023 preparations will also build into WAD 2023.