



The Sixth Meeting of the National AIDS Commission under the Chairmanship of H.E. Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma was held in the Conference Room, State House, Freetown on Thursday 21st June 2012

The Director of National AIDS Secretariat (NAS) welcomed Commissioners and Observers to the 6th NAC Meeting and commended the high level of commitment shown by the Chairman in convening such sessions. He catalogued some of the achievements of NAS; amongst them was the selection of Sierra Leone to serve in the Programme Coordinating Board of UNAIDS for three years; effective 1st January 2013. He noted the strong multi stakeholders' partnership in maintaining the low prevalence through preventive strategy; and reassured members of the Secretariat's continued efforts in responding to the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

The Chairman informed members about the two major developments in the HIV response since the last meeting: These included (i) enactment of the National AIDS Commission Act 2011 and (ii) preparation of two strategic documents (the National HIV Prevention Strategy and the Behaviour Change Communication and Advocacy Strategy) to provide direction for attainment of Goal by 2015. He highlighted some of the accomplishments such as: stabilized epidemic (1.5%), declined in HIV prevalence among pregnant women and increased coverage of Antiretroviral treatment from 5,978 to 8,115; which he attributed to steadfastness and Partners'

support. However, he noted three major challenges in attaining the goal of 'zero new HIV infections, Zero Stigma and Discrimination and Zero AIDS-related deaths' as: (i) funding gap projected at \$200,000,000.00 (ii) unmet needs of PLHIVs and (iii) youths and adolescents' sexual debut.

He reiterated Governments' continued financial support as one of the priority items in advancing the program for prosperity and strong political will in addressing HIV and AIDS in the country. He commended the efforts of Development Partners in attaining such successes, and urged members to step up their efforts in recording more successes. He also implored the private sector to honour their corporate responsibilities in providing support for their employees and clients.

Country progress Report on HIV and AIDS

Dr. Brima Kargbo – Director of NAS gave an update on progress made in the HIV response based on six priority areas indicated in the National Strategic Plan. He emphasized that Sierra Leone has a heterosexual epidemic with a higher prevalence among the Most At Risk Populations than the general population.



Dr Brima Kargbo giving his presentation to members of NAC

He further noted that since 2005, the national prevalence has been 1.5% indicating that a total of 48,000 persons are living with HIV, out of which 4,000 are children. However, he reassured members of a decline in HIV prevalence among pregnant women which has been a proxy to the general population.

Highlighting the achievements, Dr. Kargbo noted the gains in six priority areas and international recognitions of Sierra Leone as a member of UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board and potential country for the elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV by 2015.

He presented some major challenges that may impede the successes such as: sustainability of the HIV and AIDS Response and translating knowledge to behavior change. Therefore, he recommended that the commission facilitate the mobilization of resources locally and internationally, operationalize prevention strategy and update the PMTCT Strategy and Scaled Up Plan.

Phase 2 Global Fund Renewal Grant for HIV/AIDS and Health Systems Strengthening

Mr. Marxin Kanu – Admin and Finance Coordinator of NAS gave an update on the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria activities in Sierra Leone. He noted the roles of the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) Principal Recipients (PRs) and Sub Recipient (SRs) of the Grant.



Council Members in attendance

He informed members that HIV had benefitted from three Grant proposals (Rounds 4, 6, and 9) with good performance ratings; and submitted a succeeding proposal for the second phase funding of Round 9 Grant for HIV and Health Systems Strengthening (HSS). He explained the program activities, budget allocation to the various components and Government's commitment to fund 5% of the requested budget.

He explained some of the challenges in managing Sub Recipients which include; the high rate of staff attrition, transfer of health workers, poor documentation and late reporting.

As a major financier for HIV and HSS response, Mr. Kanu underscored the need for sustainability plan to maintain the successes of HIV and Free Health Care Initiative.

On that note, the Minister of Health and Sanitation buttressed those challenges as they applied to her Ministry (PR for Malaria and TB Grants) and called on the Chairman to admonish Local Councils on the standards of the Global Fund.



Hon Minister of Health and Sanitation making her contribution

Report on the Regional HIV and AIDS Partnership Forum

Mr. Abdul Rahman Sessay – Deputy Director of NAS gave a brief explanation on the various coordinating entities in the national response; and the Partnership Forum being a common platform for all partners to interface and deliberate on HIV response in order to share information, minimize waste of resources and avoid duplication of efforts.

He highlighted the key concerns raised by members during the Regional Partnership Forum (North and East) held in June 2012. These included conflict among networks (coordinating

entities), donor dependence, inability of Local Councils to fund HIV activities, high rate of teenage pregnancy, commercial sex, stigma and treatment adherence.

He called on members' attention to the following recommendations of the forums:

- Engage the Ministry of Local Government to mainstream HIV into Local Councils' development plans and allocate 10% of health budget to HIV/AIDS
- Popularize national HIV and AIDS documents
- Set up basket funding for HIV response to be managed by the commission
- Engage Family Planning Institutions to integrate HIV and family planning services
- Develop age appropriate messages
- Establish National and Regional Prevention Committees.
- Assign Information Officers to NAS Regional Offices to facilitate the coordination of information flow to communities
- Allocate 5% of royalties by mining companies to HIV response

In Conclusion, the Chairman thanked members for the successful deliberation, noting the successes and concerns for more funding, late reporting, early sexual debut and the need to ensure that the commission steps up in maintaining the achievements. He called on SPU to work with the Secretariat in providing timeframes for the implementation of recommendations.



NAC Meeting Chaired by His Excellence Dr Ernest Bai Koroma (left) and (right) Dr Brima Kargbo, Secretary to NAC and Director of NAS

He congratulated members of the Secretariat for their dedication and reiterated Government's commitment to increasing support towards the venture. He thanked all stakeholders in the HIV

response and called on Commissioners to revitalize their efforts and reverse the trend of HIV by 2015.

6TH NATIONAL AIDS COMMISSION (NAC) MEETING

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Strengthening

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Engage Family Planning Institutions to integrate HIV and family planning services

Develop age appropriate messages

Establish National and Regional Prevention Committees.

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