

PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS **OUTLINE** PLANS TO END HIV

Over the last four decades, Uganda has made significant gains in the HIV fight, but stakeholders stress that more needs to be done. This year's World AIDS Day coincided with the presidential campaign, during which candidates shared ideas on how to fight the disease. Below is what they shared:

NRM'S MUSEVENI INSISTS ON PREVENTION

Although the National Resistance Movement (NRM) manifesto does not directly talk about HIV, the party presidential candidate, Yoweri Museveni, has been at the heart of Uganda's fight against the disease since the 1980s. He was among the first leaders in Africa to encourage openness about the disease in an era when talking about sex was a taboo.

Because of his efforts, Uganda has reduced HIV prevalence and infections by over 70% since 1990. Today, about 1.5 million people in Uganda are living with HIV and over 95% are on medication.

The party also says it has supported Quality Chemical Industries Limited to produce HIV and malaria drugs, including through an off-taker agreement in which the Government committed to buying all antiretroviral drugs manufactured locally. A 12% levy on imported medicines was introduced to promote domestic production.

The President has consistently urged Ugandans to take personal responsibility in preventing HIV.

Speaking during the 2024 World AIDS Day commemoration in Buyende district, he warned against risky behaviour, noting: "There are certain things that you cannot do when you are infected. You will not die, but you will have deducted on your capacity."

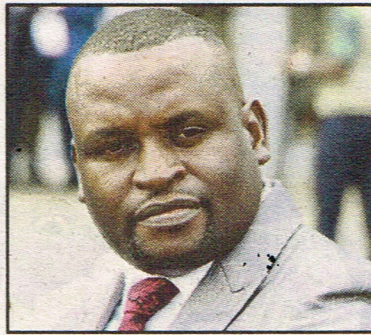
He said Uganda had eliminated two of the major transmission routes — unsafe blood transfusion and mother-to-child transmission through improved technology.

Museveni said prostitution remained the biggest challenge and cautioned people not to keep playing around with this problem.

His government has also rolled out both oral and injectable prevention drug cabotegravir at select health centres.

In June 2017, Museveni launched "The Presidential Fast-track Initiative on ending HIV and AIDS in Uganda by 2030." This is the first such initiative in Africa and the entire world.

The initiative spells out plans to tackle HIV and AIDS in Uganda through a five-point plan; engage men in HIV prevention and close the



Bulira

tap on new infections, particularly among adolescent girls and young women; accelerate implementation of test and treat and attainment of 90-90-90 targets, particularly among men and young people; consolidate progress on eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV; ensure financial sustainability for the HIV response and ensuring institutional effectiveness for a well-coordinated multi-sectoral response.

Emmanuel Dombo, the director of information and publicity at the NRM secretariat, said the complete NRM strategy on HIV is covered under the National Development Plan IV.

NUP TO INVEST MORE FUNDS

The National Unity Platform (NUP) spokesperson, Joel Senyonyi, said the fight against HIV and AIDS requires deliberate political will and sustained investment.

Quoting the party's 2025-2030 manifesto, Senyonyi said NUP is committed to increasing funding for HIV programmes and ensuring that every Ugandan who needs prevention, testing or treatment services can access them.

He said the party plans to expand access to HIV testing and antiretroviral therapy, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach communities.

"No Ugandan should walk long distances or miss treatment because drugs are unavailable at health facilities," Senyonyi said.

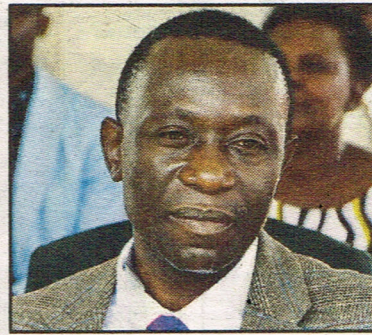
He said the party plans to intensify public awareness campaigns aimed at preventing new infections, especially among young people and other vulnerable groups.

"We must speak honestly to our young people about prevention, while also tackling stigma and discrimination that discourage many from seeking services," Senyonyi said.

He said NUP intends to integrate HIV services into primary healthcare to improve efficiency and sustainability, while supporting community-based interventions that have proven effective.

Additionally, Senyonyi said the party would strengthen accountability in the health sector and work closely with development partners to safeguard gains made over the years.

"HIV is not just a health issue; it is a



Mubiru

HIV BURDEN
Uganda has about 1.5 million people living with HIV, with 1.4 million on treatment. Prevalence among adults stands at 4.9%, according to the 2025 national HIV estimates report, while new infections have dropped by 61% since 2010. Last year, the country recorded a total of 37,000 new HIV infections — about 14,000 were young people aged 15 to 24. A total of 20,000 Ugandans succumbed to AIDS-related conditions last year.

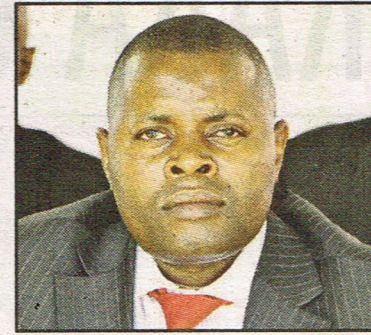
social and economic issue. Our goal is to protect the gains Uganda has made and decisively address the gaps that still put millions of lives at risk," he said.

MAFABI TO CUT DONOR DEPENDENCE

Forum for Democratic Change presidential flag-bearer Nathan Nandala Mafabi said Uganda cannot eliminate HIV without rebuilding its health system.

"We cannot keep talking about fighting HIV when our health centres have no drugs, no staff and no resources like we saw the cries after the US president stopped the HIV funding this year. A strong health system is the foundation of everything," he said.

Mafabi promised to allocate 15% of the national budget to health, in line



Kasibante

with the Abuja Declaration. He also pledged that under his leadership, Uganda will progressively finance its HIV response domestically.

"Our people should not be abandoned because another country changes its policies," Mafabi said.

He emphasised youth-centred prevention, vowing to run modern sensitisation campaigns suited for teenagers in schools, churches, mosques and community spaces.

Mafabi also wants individuals to have access to a wider range of prevention tools.

Beyond prevention, he promised to fund research, especially for Ugandan scientists.

MUNTU TO FIGHT HIV, CORRUPTION

In an interview in Mbale last week, Maj. Gen. (rtd) Mugisha Muntu, the Alliance for National Transformation candidate, said Uganda must confront corruption to revive its HIV response.

"Fighting HIV and AIDS shall be our top priority, but this comes immediately after we have addressed rampant corruption that has bedevilled the country," he said.

Muntu said an aggressive anti-corruption strategy would result in savings that would fill the sh546b funding gap left by the withdrawal of US support for HIV activities.

"Our new strategy includes the recovery of misappropriated funds and the cancellation of all fraudulent government contracts, after which money shall be earmarked for the procurement of essential medicine," he said.

Muntu promised increased HIV mainstreaming in the budget, offering tax breaks and low-interest financing to pharmaceutical companies like Quality Chemicals to, boost domestic

production of medicine and test kits.

BULIRA ROOTS FOR FREE TESTING

Revolutionary People's Party presidential candidate Frank Bulira pledged free and reliable access to HIV testing and counselling across all health centres and promised uninterrupted medicine supplies in every district.

His plan includes strengthening prevention services for young people, women and high-risk communities, and expanding community outreach through health workers and digital platforms.

Bulira also promised to integrate HIV services into the national/community health insurance scheme and strengthen maternal health services to eliminate mother-to-child transmission.

He said his government would support nutrition and mental health services for people living with HIV.

KASIBANTE TO FIGHT NEW INFECTIONS

National Peasants' Party candidate Robert Kasibante plans a detailed evidence-based strategy that focuses on prevention, treatment and tackling structural drivers of new infections.

His plan includes scaling up HIV testing, expanding pre-exposure prophylaxis, especially for adolescent girls, young women and key populations, and promoting voluntary medical male circumcision.

Kasibante also called for intensified behaviour change campaigns using digital platforms and peer-led approaches.

He promised uninterrupted medicines supplies, improved viral load monitoring, and community drug distribution points to reduce clinic congestion.

Kasibante also proposed comprehensive sexuality education in schools, expansion of youth-friendly services and tackling gender-based violence and economic vulnerabilities that drive risk.

Kasibante also pledged increased domestic financing, stronger laboratories and supply chains.

MABIRIZI TO WORK WITH SCHOOLS

Conservative Party's Elton Joseph Mubiru said HIV prevention must involve every institution from homes to schools and cultural structures.

"The fight against HIV and AIDS is a fight for all of us. It's like the fight against dictatorship, everybody has to get involved," he said.

Mubiru promised a strong treatment and counselling system in hospitals, encouraging positive living. He cited the example of Philly Lutaaya as a symbol of how people living with HIV have contributed to raising awareness.

He also proposed that Parliament passes a law that harshly punishes people who deliberately spread the virus.



Museveni

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Filed by Nelson Mandela Muhoozi, John Museveni, Umar Kashaka, John Masaba and Isaac Nuwagaba