

SUPPORT

Under the memorandum of understanding, the US funding will be channelled through the national budget, writes **Mary Karugaba**

The governments of Uganda and the US yesterday signed a co-operation agreement for funding the health sector to the tune of \$2.3b (about sh8.1 trillion).

According to the five-year deal that starts next year, about \$1.7b (about sh6 trillion) will be contributed by the US and \$600m (about sh2.1 trillion) will be contributed by the Government of Uganda.

The deal, signed at the finance ministry headquarters in Kampala, places more emphasis on transparency, domestic financing and long-term system strengthening, marking one of the most significant funding commitments in Uganda's health sector in recent years.

Under the memorandum of understanding (MOU), witnessed by the permanent secretaries and other officials of the implementing sectors, the US funding will be channelled through the national budget. It will go towards priority health programmes, including HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, maternal and child health, polio eradication, global health security, laboratory networks, and emergency preparedness.

The money will also be apportioned to strengthening the health workforce, securing essential medicines, improving disease surveillance, and boosting emergency preparedness and laboratory systems.

A major portion of the funds will go towards training and equipping 14,000 community health extension workers, building on the 1,000 already trained with American support.

Uganda has committed to progressively taking over salaries and financing for these workers as donor funding tapers.

WHAT USA SAYS

Speaking on behalf of the US government, William Popp, the US ambassador to Uganda, said the agreement reflects the US' renewed focus on ensuring every dollar of American taxpayer funding delivers measurable results.

Popp said the deal represents a decisive break from the past

USA, UGANDA SEAL SH8.1 TRILLION HEALTH SECTOR FUNDING DEAL



L-R: Aceng, Kasaija and Popp after signing the agreement for funding the health sector. This was at the finance ministry headquarters in Kampala yesterday. (Scan picture using the Vision Digital Experience to watch video)

and a "renewed contract of accountability" between the two countries.

"This clear and accountable arrangement outlines how our governments will support life-saving services, strengthen systems that protect both our countries, and ensure responsible use of American taxpayer dollars," he said.

"For years, the old model created parallel systems and a culture of dependence. This MOU marks a shift towards self-reliance, national leadership and durable systems.

WHAT UGANDA SAYS

Speaking at the signing ceremony, finance minister Matia Kasaija described the moment as "a memorable occasion that reaffirms the strength of the Uganda-US partnership".

Kasaija said the MOU adds another building block to the tremendous support the US has consistently offered to the Government of Uganda.

He mentioned the areas of US support, including HIV and AIDS care, TB and malaria control, maternal and child health, and global health security activities.

For years, the old model created parallel systems and a culture of dependence. This MOU marks a shift towards self-reliance, national leadership and durable systems.

and programmes.

"We are pleased to sign this MOU, whose provisions will guide and deepen collaboration between our two governments in the health sector. I take note of the need to prevent the spread of emerging and existing infectious diseases and the threats globally, to which the US government commits to support us for the next five years," the minister said.

He emphasised that the collaboration extends beyond disease-specific interventions.

"This partnership will not only result in improved outcomes for HIV, TB, malaria and other conditions, but will also strengthen our national systems, institutions and workforce capacity. This is commendable

and transformative."

Kasaija called upon all stakeholders involved to live up to the provision of the MOU and make it practical for the benefit of the two nations.

He extended appreciation to the US government for its long-standing contribution to Uganda's health agenda.

The Minister of Health, Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, described the support as a huge bilateral health investment to Uganda, a powerful testament to decades of friendship and resounding vote of confidence in Uganda's vision and leadership.

"For generations, the US partnership has been instrumental in our fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, maternal and child mortality, and emerging infectious diseases. Today, we elevate that

relationship from traditional aid to a strategic, sovereign-driven partnership that fully aligns with and accelerates Uganda's own health sector development plan," she said.

Aceng said the collaboration will deliver two complementary streams of support that empowers Uganda to recruit and retain health workers, upgrade and maintain infrastructure and plan strategically for the long term.

She also cited off-budget support that guarantees essential medicines, commodities and cutting-edge technical expertise through implementing partners.

Aceng was optimistic that the resources will build a resilient, responsive and sustainable health system owned and led by Uganda.

"The COVID-19 pandemic and our repeated successful containment of Ebola, Marburg and Sudan virus outbreaks have taught the world a clear lesson. Pathogens respect no borders. Uganda has repeatedly served as the global first line of defence. Our ability to rapidly detect, diagnose, and contain outbreaks is a global public good," Aceng said.

The agreement also

BACKGROUND

An executive order early this year by US President Donald Trump's administration, drastically impacted Uganda, halting over \$350m (sh1.2 trillion) in funding for critical health (HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB), education, and research programmes.

The funding cut threatened supplies like ARVs and caused job losses, prompting calls for Uganda to increase its own health financing and reduce depending on foreign aid.

Research and education programmes at Makerere University and other institutions, including scholarships and infrastructure projects, were halted, progress on several government projects stalled and many Ugandan health workers and support staff were laid off.

The Government, however, quickly mobilised domestic resources to finance the urgent needs of the health sector.

Dr Juuko Ndawula, the director of the International Research Institute of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, noted that although foreign aid will always come with strings attached, Uganda has no choice as of now, but to accept the funding.

"Following the USAID cut, the Government has been looking for other sources of funding. It is unfortunate that we have not yet reached that level of rejecting the money even when we know there are strings attached. We need to work towards financial independence. It is good the Government has woken up, and is looking for its own ways of financing its budget," Juuko said.

introduces a new framework for handling biological samples and health data, an issue that has previously sparked tensions.

The MOU emphasises sovereign consent, transparency and equitable access to any knowledge, vaccines or therapeutics developed from shared data.

"Uganda's sovereignty over its biological resources and health data is non-negotiable," Aceng said.