

# Acholi chiefs agree to champion fight against HIV

## GULU

By Jackson Kitara

Acholi cultural leaders, under their umbrella body Ker Kal Kwaro, have committed to working closely with the Uganda AIDS Commission to intensify efforts aimed at ending HIV and AIDS in the sub-region and beyond.

The agreement was reached during a high-level engagement held on Friday at the cultural institution's headquarters in Kanyagoga ward, Bardege-Layibi division in Gulu city.

The meeting brought together cultural leaders and officials from the Uganda AIDS Commission to strengthen collaboration in the fight against HIV.

The chiefs pledged to take an active role in mobilising communities, influencing policy, reducing stigma and promoting access to HIV

## STATS

According to Uganda AIDS Commission data, HIV prevalence in Acholi stands at 7%, above the national average of 4.8%, making it the second highest in the country. Gulu city leads within the region at 9.8%, followed by Pader and Nwoya districts.

prevention, treatment and care services. They also identified harmful cultural practices that contribute to the spread of HIV and proposed community-driven solutions to address them.

Martin Okumu, the deputy prime minister of the Acholi cultural institution, said the chiefs are ready to work hand in hand with the Government and other stakeholders to

educate communities about HIV and AIDS.

"We are committed to sensitising our people and creating awareness about the dangers of HIV/AIDS," Okumu said, adding that the high prevalence in Acholi is partly linked to moral breakdown during the Lord's Resistance Army war, when many people lived in internally displaced people's camps, alongside poverty and rising prostitution.

He said the cultural institution has previously supported public health campaigns, including a recent partnership with the Ministry of Health on malaria sensitisation and vaccination awareness.

Victor Rwengabo, the co-ordinator for the mid-northern region at the Uganda AIDS Commission, said the engagement with cultural leaders had helped identify key social and cultural drivers of HIV in Acholi.