Options for long term sustainable financing of HIV and AIDS responses in Uganda: results of a stakeholder survey

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Introduction: The fiscal sustainability of HIV/AIDS responses in Uganda is increasingly uncertain. On one hand, overall costs of HIV/AIDS are rising, due to a commitment to achieve universal access and the changing need for services by people living with HIV. On the other hand, there is limited availability of domestic public financial resources, coupled with flat or declining levels of donor support (including funding transitions projected on the horizons in the next 6 – 10 years). Against this backdrop, a discussion about options to fund the national AIDS response in the future becomes very pertinent. This study elicits preferences among a group of key stakeholders (donors, people living with HIV, service providers, government, academia and HIV-related industry) on the issue of fiscal sustainability of HIV/AIDS responses and the future funding of HIV services, with a view to understanding the different degrees of acceptability between policy interventions and future funding options as well as their feasibility.

Methods: We invited 266 individuals to participate in an online survey collecting preferences on a variety of revenue-generating mechanisms and cost/demand reducing policies.

Results: We received 205 responses to our survey from all stakeholder groups. Across all groups, the highest preference was for policies to finance HIV services, and indeed universal health coverage (UHC), through public finances. There was a broad consensus not to reallocate resources from social security/education. Between stakeholders, there were marked differences of opinion between industry/advisory and a range of other groups, with industry being generally more in favour of market-based interventions and an increased role for the private sector in HIV financing/delivery. Conversely, stakeholders from academia, government, and civil society were relatively more in favour of more restrictive purchasing of new and expensive technologies, and (to varying extent) of higher income/corporate taxes. Taxes on sugar sweetened beverages, ultra-processed foods, tobacco and alcohol were by far considered the most politically feasible option.

Conclusions: According to this study, policy options that are broadly acceptable across stakeholder groups with different inherent interests exist but are limited to public finance (drawn from ordinary tax revenues), and excise taxes on harmful products. Representatives from the private sector tend to view solutions rooted in the private sector as both effective and politically feasible options, while stakeholders from academia and the public sector seem to place more emphasis on solutions that do not disproportionately impact certain population groups.