

The National HIV/AIDS Secretariat and partners in collaboration with local council city mayors, district



His worship the Mayor of Freetown city council, Sam Baba Bordae Gibson

chairpersons have officially launched the CITIES INITIATIVE in high burden locations with the theme: “Ending Epidemics – Delivering Differently”.

This auspicious event started on the eve of Monday 29th May 2017 at a dinner at the Makeni City Council Hall witnessed the signing of declaration of commitment by city mayors, district chairpersons, community chiefs and major stake holders in the fight against HIV and AIDS with the First Lady as chief guest of honour.

In his opening statement, the chair of the programme, his lordship the mayor of Freetown; Sam Franklyn Baba Bordae Gibson recited how the fast-track cities initiative project came about which was part of the 2016 United Nation (UN) Political Declaration calling on countries to end AIDS by 2030, a declaration that was signed in Paris on 1st December 2014. The projects are part of the Sustainable Development Goal 3 aiming at ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.



Her Worship the Mayor of Makeni city council, Madam Sunkari Kamara

Delivering her statement on behalf of the Makeni city council, her lordship Madam Sunkari Kamara called on her peers to join other cities around the world and to lead a process that would bring to the end provided they followed 'due process' within their cities which would not only reduced new infections, but also ensured that those affected have requisite medication as well as the un-born. She re-quoted the First lady "Let no child be born again with HIV".

Studies have shown that cities and urban areas accounted for more than a quarter of the 35 million people living with HIV, and those affected with HIV worldwide. The 200 cities most affected by the epidemic estimated for sierra Leone; - [one person living with HIV leaves in one of the seven big cities, and one pregnant sero-prevalence woman out of three]. She called on key players to commit and ensure themselves that the fast track response should start in order to ultimately end the epidemic. She said to commit to a fast track responses to their cities, towns and villages is as a crucial method in ending the AIDS epidemic. She appealed to elected representatives to demonstrate solidarity to the course of the fight against HIV and AIDS.

She said, our cities should be ready, flexible and creative to provide platforms that could contribute to the AIDS epidemic in a pragmatic, balanced and efficient way, "our cities should act as a fora where the linkages, trust, respect and inclusiveness that are part of any sustainable solution could be built". She underscored the need for access to treatment for marginalized and often stigmatized groups like commercial sex workers, people who inject drugs and men who have sex with men.

On behalf of the National AIDS Secretariat, the Director General Alhaji Dr. Sesay said that the City Initiative did not come by chance, but by epidemiological evidence



Director General of NAS Alhaji Dr. Momodu Sesay

which showed that the prevalence in our cities is high and contributed to about 35% to 40% of the overall burden of HIV in Sierra Leone. Our cities are densely populated, characterized by high level of social interventions, risky social behaviors, high teenage pregnancies, and increase number of key and vulnerable population disposure to the risk of HIV transmission. He said of the estimated 53,000 people living with HIV in Sierra Leone, 20,458 lived in seven of our cities. Freetown; 14,520. Kenema; 1,102, Bo; 1,353, Kono; 1,692, Makeni 831 and Port-Loko 716 respectively. At the moment, the fight against HIV and AIDS has taken a paradigm shift towards specific geographical locations and key populations know as drivers of the epidemic. He succinctly stated that the major objective of the CITY INITIATIVE is to increase coverage of HIV services through locally driven demand creation activities. Thus accelerating a fast track implementation of HIV interventions towards meeting 90 90 90 global targets.

- 90 percent of people living in S/L are tested to know their HIV status
- 90 percent of people who are known to be HIV-positive are put on treatment
- 90 percent of people who are in treatment have suppressed viral loads
- Zero discrimination, including stigma

The Director General stressed that the role of mayors and chairpersons of councils in this respect could not be over emphasized. He said the involvement of key stake holders and the centralized level of governance would push us through in achieving this target. With lessons learnt from the Ebola outbreak, the National AIDS Secretariat is ready to work with all partners to move this initiative forward in making HIV and AIDS a disease of non-public health in S/Leone.

The Country Director for UNAIDS, Dr. Michael Gboun, said, “in terms of live saving interventions, countries in the West and Central Africa region are lagging behind and need to accelerate their responses to HIV epidemic fight. He said that ART coverage is low of about 40%, PMTCT coverage is about 96% which is yet to be validated. 53,000 people in Sierra Leone are infected out of which 14,000 are in Freetown, so to achieve the 90, 90, 90 target, commitment by mayors will push to accelerate the fight. Cities play a critical role in the response thereby setting the pace for an accelerated response by uniting as leaders to reach the ‘Fast-track’ targets.”



Dr. Mike Gboun - UNAIDS

Dr. Gboun said it is unacceptable for any child to be born with HIV in the country hence criminal for anyone to die from HIV due to self-denial caused by stigma and discrimination. He said death can be preventable if one go for his or her test and access free ART.

In her keynote statement, First Lady of the republic of Sierra Leone; Sia Nyama Koroma described the event as 'crucial'



The First Lady Madam Sia Koroma Signing the declaration of commitment

toward the country's efforts in accelerating and fast-tracking the implementation of national response to HIV and AIDS. She said it underscored government determination in tackling the disease in a comprehensive and coordinated manner in the local levels.

Since 2016, when the national strategic plan to strike HIV from the list of public threats in the country was launched, government has been constantly reminding itself of the urgency to fast-track and end AIDS by 2030. She said as the country moved towards achieving zero new infection, zero related death, and zero stigma and discrimination; it is of importance to ensure that 90% of citizens know their status.

The representative of the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations said action taken by cities through the fast-track cities initiative will contribute very directly to the achievement of the global Sustainable Development Goals number 3. He said witnessing all 19 Mayors and council chairpersons signing on the Paris Declaration is a symbol of their collective and individual commitment to end AIDS in the country makes the event remarkable.

The Resident Coordinator representative said Sierra Leone has a low prevalence of HIV and AIDS when compared to other countries pointing that if communities are involve in the process as was done during the fight against Ebola, the country will be able to stamp out the epidemic.

The event was climax with the First Lady handing over baby packs to pregnant women and lactating mothers as a way of encouraging them to adhere to antenatal visits to reduce child

mortality.

By courtesy of:

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