

2ND UGANDA ALCOHOL POLICY CONFERENCE KAMPALA, UGANDA

Mobilizing Partnerships and Community Action for a society Free from Alcohol Harm

27th November 2020

CONFERENCE STATEMENT

Introduction

From the 26th – 27th November 2020, Uganda Alcohol Policy Alliance (UAPA) in partnership with the Ministry of Health hosted the second Uganda Alcohol Policy Conference (UAPC20) in Kampala. UAPC was initiated to address an information gap where evidence on alcohol harm can be widely disseminated and translated into action.

UAPC20 featured virtual and physical participation in order to adhere to the Standard Operating Procedures of the COVID-19 pandemic. UAPC20 attracted wider involvement (over 200 participants including civil society organisations, researchers, development partners, practitioners and other professionals) from 21 countries (Africa, Europe, Asia, America). Conference subthemes included International Perspectives on Alcohol Harm, Implications of alcohol Use – to individuals, families, communities and the society, COVID-19 and Alcohol, Alcohol Harm: propagators, victims and solutions, Building networks, coalitions and Community action.

We recognise the important steps taken by government to control alcohol misuse in the recent past. These include; banning of alcohol sachet packaging of less 200mls in early 2019, passing the National Alcohol Control Policy by Cabinet in October 2019 and closure of bars and drinking spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also commended are the efforts at local levels that has seen introduction of bylaws at local government level.

Key Observations

- The African region has been pointed out as an outlier in terms of implementation of WHO Global Alcohol Strategy – yet we carry the biggest burden of harmful alcohol use.
- 14 of 17 SDGs are adversely affected by alcohol, 1 person is lost to alcohol every 15 minutes. Alcohol Worsens NCDs, communicable diseases, harms others and the economy.
- In Uganda, alcohol remains the most commonly used substance of addiction with an array of social economic problems yet enforcement of alcohol prevention policies is inadequate. As observed during the COVID-19 period, the Alcohol industry has continued to undermine and work against the government efforts to reverse its negative consequences. We observe numerous myths on Alcohol during the

covid-19 pandemic were identified including taking alcohol to protect one from the virus. Such myths complicate the fight against harmful alcohol use, compromise the body immune system and increases the risk of adverse health outcomes.

- Government has initiated some preventive and treatment interventions but they still remain inadequate. Much of the prevention initiatives are conducted by the private sector yet their competency is not established.

Possible solutions

- Implement tax measures: Evidence suggests that a total of 20% global increase in alcohol taxes alone could avert 9million premature deaths, and accumulate as much as \$9trillion globally over 50 years. There is a need to plough back some of the increased revenue from taxation of alcohol to boost research and intervention activities aimed at alcohol harm reduction.
- Consider interventions appropriate for low resource settings such as individual based programs by empowering community health workers with alcohol based information
- Joint action through Public/Private Partnerships and wider stakeholder involvement: Community, traditional, religious healers and local leaders' should be involved in the formulation of alcohol control regulations might be a reliable strategy in ensuring future compliance. Alcohol control measures developed jointly with communities and leaders' involvement and participation, are likely to attract better implementation and compliance.
- Special appeal to the Development Partners to fund strategies targeted at reducing harmful alcohol use. These efforts go a long way in reducing NCDs, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, permanent brain damage, injuries, road traffic accidents and a host of other challenges directly linked with harmful alcohol use.
- Policy makers: Urgently implement the alcohol policy and bill to control alcohol availability, drink-driving counter-measures, alcohol marketing and advertising in order to free society from alcohol harm.
- Capacity Building: Strengthening capacity and technical support for prevention of harmful use of alcohol.

Conclusion:

Alcohol misuse is highly prevalent in Uganda, but remains a largely unaddressed issue. Whereas the government of Uganda recognizes its responsibility to protect its citizens from harmful use alcohol, big strides must be taken to operationalise the alcohol use policy, boost research and support interventions to more adequately address the level of alcohol-related harm in the country.