

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING



JUNE 2004 NO. 10

“AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION EQUALS A POUND OF CURE”

On 11 July 2004, at the XV International AIDS Conference, young people will join policy and decision makers as they struggle with how to ensure access to HIV and AIDS information, skills, services and care for all. This 10th issue of “What Young People are Saying” underscores young people’s dedication to the fight against HIV and AIDS and their unique capacity to pinpoint the critical issues, concrete solutions and recommendations for what we all can do – together.

OVERVIEW

“How can you help stop the spread of HIV and AIDS?” Since January 2002, young people from every region of the world, girls and boys, posted more than 900 messages on the *Voices of Youth* HIV and AIDS message board responding to this question.

Their opinions and recommendations touch on all facets of this question, including prevention methods and approaches, contributing factors such as intravenous drug use, gender violence, poverty and war, and the very real and frightening consequences of the epidemic, including orphans.

The breadth of the discussions and diversity in participants, however, does not preclude focus. Independent of the specific topic, almost all messages end with a call for HIV and AIDS information and knowledge for all and a reminder that the epidemic is global and requires everyone’s commitment – young people, parents, governments, religious leaders, and communities alike.



BARBADOS

“...even though it might not infect everyone, it does however AFFECT each and everyone. It is everyone’s fight...” *girl, >21*

Young people on *Voices of Youth* also give specific suggestions and recommendations for action. They call on their peers to spread the word, keep themselves educated and educate others. They also remind each other to maintain a forward looking perspective and prioritize their “bright” futures.

To leaders and decision makers the call is to break the silence around HIV and AIDS, and to provide communities and their youth with the resources, social, human and financial, needed to fight effectively. Additionally, participants from countries in conflict made a plea for peace and an end to gender-based violence.

Following is a brief summary of young people’s comments and suggestions.

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THIS MONTH ON VOICES OF YOUTH

[Join the e-dialogues for International AIDS Conference in Bangkok](#)

Make sure your voices are heard and impact the agenda. [Read more!](#)

WEBSITE SPOTLIGHT

[VOY #1](#)

In May VOY was the #1 visited area of the UNICEF website! *Thanks!*

UPCOMING

[New games](#)

Get ready from some games on VOY: HIV Life skills, quizzes...

[New module on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children](#)

Voices of Youth continues to build new modules. Be informed and check them out!

INSIGHT OF THE MONTH

“...we cannot help too many children if only a handful of us try and that too in separate corners of the world. We need to come together and formulate a plan to ensure the comfort and chance to every single child on the planet... Together I'm sure we can do something. We are the children of tomorrow, the future is our responsibility.” *girl, 16, India*

UPCOMING AUGUST ISSUE
Education

HIV AND AIDS

ISSUES IN CONTEXT

June 2004

Click on a link to read **What Young People Are Saying about HIV and AIDS**

[Information & knowledge](#) [Contributing factors](#) [Stigma & discrimination](#) [ABC of prevention](#) [Consequences](#) [What can young people do?](#) [What can leaders do?](#)

INFORMATION & KNOWLEDGE

Of the many issues discussed, young people on *Voices of Youth* dedicate the most attention to the critical need for HIV and AIDS information and knowledge. Participants lament the lack of access to quality and comprehensive information, and call for adults and young people to “no longer take sex education as a TABOO, to discuss with young people, for this is one reason they are still in the dark” (boy, 20, Uganda)



UGANDA

“Many youth are still at risk, mainly because they have not been introduced to the right Information. And who is going to help them?...It is me and you. All those misconceptions about AIDS are just because the right, helpful information seem to be the other side of the mountain.” *boy, 20*

School: In addition to peer education, young people also discuss the need for HIV and AIDS education to be formally introduced into school curricula. However, participants make clear that the information must be culturally relevant and based on a comprehensive situation analysis of behaviour patterns relating to HIV risk, and should incorporate young people’s views and perspectives.



NIGERIA

“The starting point for designing a good curriculum for AIDS education should be to make a proper situation assessment. This involves...for example, [finding out] what is the average age at which they [students] first have sexual intercourse, what are their most common forms of sexual behaviour and of drug consumption (including alcohol) and when they tend to leave school. Such an assessment should start by asking young people’s views. Asking young people is essential as young people do not necessarily share

adults’ attitudes on sexual and drug behaviour.” *boy, >21*

The family: Family, in particular parents and guardians, play a critical role in ensuring young people have access, and are exposed to, the information they need about HIV and AIDS. As possibly the greatest influencers in young people’s lives, parents “must be advised to give their child the expected education on this matter so that when they grow up, their will be able to play safe.” (boy, 20, Nigeria).

Religious leaders: Young people on *Voices of Youth* give particular attention to religious leaders and institutions, and the great impact they can have in terms of spreading awareness about the virus and disease. They ask religious leaders to break the taboo that prevents them from preaching about HIV and put the “protection of the people” first.



BANGLADESH

“In any Muslim country Imams of Mosques are in great respect. If THEY tell something, everyone follows them. So if they can be engaged in this campaign, a huge people will be made aware of this.” *girl, 20*

Media: Given its wide reach, young people see the media as an excellent tool for increasing awareness around HIV and AIDS. Participants suggest global campaigns and public service announcements to get the basic information out. They talk of the particular efficacy of celebrity spoke persons, specifically athletes, and people living with HIV and AIDS, for raising awareness among youth.



UGANDA

“Thank God Uganda is now spread with a lot of information about Aids, We have seen high profile people

taken by it, For example the most famous musician PHILLY LUTAYA, who stopped in the middle of a concert and proclaimed that he was HIV positive, this man opened the eyes of very many people about the disease...”

boy, >21

However, participants are clear that the media can only have an impact if the entire community, local, national and international, provides young people with the support and reinforcement they need to internalize this information. This requires breaking down the taboos and fostering open communication and dialogue.



INDIA

“people hesitate to talk about sex, they lack in frankness, So I think that apart from giving education about HIV and AIDS they also must be encouraged not to hesitate and come forward. And even if they save just one life then it is worth it.” *boy, 19*

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Young people on *Voices of Youth* recognize that a discussion on HIV and AIDS requires consideration of a wide range of additional issues, such as poverty, gender, conflict, and drugs, among others.

Poverty: Within the context of HIV and AIDS, participants see poverty preventing young people from getting an education where they can learn about HIV as well as develop life skills to keep themselves safe. They also talk of poverty taking away young people’s hope for the future, thereby rendering them disinclined to care about safety.



DR CONGO

“Le sida c'est l'affaire des autres" oubliant qu'on peut se retrouver un jour parmi les AUTRES. Il s'agit là de la négligence et de manque d'amour pour soi et pour autrui.” *boy, >21*

Additionally, participants speak of a lack of funds and resources for HIV initiatives and resources, particularly in poverty-stricken countries.

Gender: Many messages talk of gender discrimination and violence as a contributing factor to the spread of HIV and AIDS. Participants agree that



YOUTH POEMS FROM NIGERIA...

*The following poems were written
by Chinyere, Voices of Youth
member from Nigeria*

AIDS is real

Aids Is Danger
Aids Is Stranger
Know Your Worth
Recreate Your Thought
Guard Your Life
Change Your Style
Mould Your Ways
Amend Your Perception
Receive Orientation
Emotions Are Real
Watch The Feel
Close The Seal
Make A Deal
Test your Blood
AIDS is Real

Access for all

Education means life
Widen the horizon
Enlarge the coast
Empower the youths
Enlighten the children
Mobilise the adults
Motivate peer educators
Educate all stakeholders
Disseminate information for devel-
opment
Re-orientation for advancement
Fight the virus
Share the vaccines
Spread the news

AIDS Clock Ticks

Tick Tick
The Clock Ticks
Tick Tick
The Warning Ticks
Tick Tick
The Death Toll Ticks
Tick Tick
The Guideline Persists
Tick Tick
The Information Resurfaces
Tick Tick
Save A Soul
Tick Tick
Spread The News
Tick Tick
Aids Is Real

HIV AND AIDS

the disproportionate number of girls without an education, means a disproportionate number of girls without information about HIV and AIDS.



AUSTRALIA

"I think this issue also ties back into educating girls. A lot of girls/women who contract AIDS every year don't have any knowledge of how to protect themselves from the virus..." *girl, 17*

In further emphasizing the need to maintain a gendered perspective, members also spoke of sexual violence against girls, giving particular attention to rape and sexual abuse, both in general and in conflict situations. Commercial sexual exploitation of girls is also raised, with particular reference to prostitution among girls without employment opportunities.

Intravenous drug use (IDU): Some messages give particular attention to the dangers, and particularities of, transmission through IDU. One member from China, spoke of the particular challenge of effectively communicating with young drug users stating:



CHINA

"It's hard to tell people to stop, since the addicts sort of don't listen, and have sex as a fun and relaxing activity... If I could talk to them, I would tell them to not give up..." *girl, 13*

STIGMA & DISCRIMINATION

A major consequence of the lack of information and knowledge is stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS. Participants give personal accounts of neighbors dying alone "abandoned, helpless" because people feared being "labeled sick", and children orphaned by AIDS "being chased from school". As with many other themes, members call for open communication, information and dialogue to break the taboos around HIV and ensure care and support.



IRAN

"In our societies people have bad behaviour with these sick persons. Because people don't have enough information about it and its treatments... I think we should accept these sick persons and society shouldn't refuse them." *boy, 16*

THE ABC OF PREVENTION

Young people on *Voices of Youth* debate which of the three methods (abstinence, fidelity, condom use) of HIV prevention they believe the most effective. A large number of participants give prominence to abstinence and fidelity, making statements such as: "AIDS is death, death is AIDS... the best way to avoid death is to abstain from sex or have it only with one partner." (boy, 18, Nigeria).

Still others feel that condoms are the only realistic prevention method as young people are, and will continue, to be sexually active.

Independent of which method, however, all participants agree that the real key to prevention is behaviour change, and the key to behaviour change is a change in attitudes and perspective. Young people need hope and opportunities and to believe in themselves.



JAPAN

"I think people, especially we the young people, need to change our attitudes towards sex issues. That is a change for the better. We need to adopt positive living styles if we are to remain free from HIV." *girl, 17*

HIV AND AIDS

CONSEQUENCES

Although the main focus remains on prevention, young people on *Voices of Youth* clearly grasp the consequences of a world ravaged by HIV and AIDS. Participants speak of the overarching socio-cultural and economic impact HIV is having on their countries. Particular focus is given to the increasing number of children and adolescents orphaned by AIDS, and the inability of communities and governments to provide the care and support these orphans require.



KENYA

"The parents that are infected normally leave their children as orphans. Some of the orphans are taken to orphan homes. Most of the street boys and girls are as a result of this virus."
girl, 14

CONCLUSION

Young people on *Voices of Youth* recognize the complex nature of the HIV and AIDS epidemic and the role they play in the struggle to stop the spread of the virus.

They call on their peers to take responsibility for their actions, and help others to keep themselves safe. However, the battle cannot be won alone. Young people ask their leaders, parents and guardians to support, lead and join them in this global fight – as "together we will win".



PHILIPPINES

"It's a matter of give and take. And it's all about making the difference when no one dares to care. It's about the next generation of healthy individuals not hampered by a burden they should not have brought. It's about living fulfilled lives."
boy, 17

Read past VOY newsletters and summaries on HIV And AIDS:

- [December 2002 Newsletter](#)
- [March 2004: The Caribbean Summit on Young People and HIV/AIDS](#)
- [May 2002: HIV/AIDS \(Intergenerational dialogue\)](#)
- [December 2001: HIV/AIDS in Africa](#)

WHAT CAN YOUNG PEOPLE DO?



BANGLADESH

"No law can stop AIDS – mon, only awareness can stop this monster and make a beautiful world."
girl, 20

Take control: "Aids is something that we can control, if we are educated properly. The decision to be hiv/aids free is up to you. (girl, 15, USA)

Life skills / Protect ourselves: "We can't fight/heal Aids but we can prevent it through education and health promotions. UNICEF has provided us with enough life skills promotions and thus I have learnt how to protect myself. Not having sex won't kill you but aids will." (boy, 21, Australia)

Future vision: "Its a pity our generation is no longer inclined towards tomorrow, but through personal determination for a better future, we shall win the war" (boy, 22, Nigeria)

Provide care and support: "These people [living with HIV] need us to keep their hope, to show them love, care and respect. We should understand their situation, in that way we shall learn the pain they go through and perhaps change our reckless lifestyles." (boy, 20, Uganda)

WHAT CAN LEADERS DO?

Financial support and encouragement: "A lot of youths nongovernmental organisations are in Nigeria, but they are not encouraged to campaign against this deadly disease due to lack of funds." (boy, >21, Nigeria)

Stop war: "Mettre fin à la guerre et l'invasion de notre pays par les pays réputés comme ayant le taux le plus élevé de contamination..." (boy, >21, DR Congo)

Engage religious leaders: "religious leaders need to be sensitized on how to handle this issue because the youth in the Church seem to have very little information about the challenge, yet AIDS cuts across all denominations." (boy, 20, Uganda)



MICRONESIA

"We need a change in the foundation of society...Like the saying goes, an ounce of prevention equals a pound of cure...I believe that ONLY EDUCATION will be the means to preventing the spread of AIDS...The old world is dying for the new world. No MORE BAND-AID COVER UPS, take action...educate people from their youngest age to the age of maturity about spiritual solution to a physical ailment. It is the only way."
girl, 18

VOICES OF YOUTH

<http://www.unicef.org/vo/>

Since 1995, VOY has focused on exploring the educational and community building potential of the Internet, and facilitating the active and substantive participation of young people on child rights and development related issues.

Through web boards, interactive quizzes, youth leadership profiles, live chats and more, *Voices of Youth* provides more than 20,000 young people from over 180 countries with an opportunity to self-inform, engage in lively debate, and partner—with their peers and decision makers—to create a world fit for children.



XV INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE
11 – 16 JULY, BANGKOK, THAILAND
JOIN THE VOICES OF YOUTH DISCUSSIONS
MAKE YOUR VOICES HEARD IN BANGKOK

“**Access for All**” is the theme for this year’s XVth International AIDS Conference, in Bangkok, Thailand. For one week, from 11 – 16 July, policy makers, scientists, government officials, community members and young people will come together to focus on ensuring access to HIV and AIDS information and knowledge, skills, services and care for every person, regardless of age, gender, HIV-status or location.

To make sure young people’s voices, visions and hopes are heard in Bangkok, *Voices of Youth* has opened a discussion board dedicated exclusively to the Conference. The comments, opinions and suggestions posted on this board may inform the Conference’s agenda. The discussion forum will stay open after the Conference, and comments may be included in the outcome document(s).

Here is a quick overview of some of the main conference issues:

Information and Knowledge: Young people cannot protect themselves if they do not know the facts about HIV and AIDS. Around the world, many young people do not have access to the basic facts about HIV and AIDS; or the available information does not seem relevant. It is important to learn the facts before becoming sexually active, and to have the information regularly reinforced and built on, both in school and beyond.

Question: In your opinion, what needs to happen for every young person in your community to know the basic facts about HIV and AIDS?

Skills: Behaviour is not changed by knowledge alone. Young people need skills to be able to use what they know about HIV and AIDS to keep themselves safe. Some of the most important skills for HIV and AIDS prevention are “Life skills” – skills in negotiation, communication, decision making, handling disagreements (conflict resolution) and critical thinking.

Question: What do you think are the most important skills young people need to keep themselves safe from HIV and AIDS?

Services: Youth-friendly health services are key for preventing HIV and AIDS. They provide young people with health information, including about HIV and AIDS, treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and also offer voluntary and confidential counselling and testing (VCCT) so young people can learn their HIV status and understand the responsibilities they have to themselves and others as a result.

Question: What do you think can be done to improve access to prevention and care services for young people in your community?

See [Voices of Youth](#) for more information on HIV and AIDS