

Preventing HIV among Children and Youth Through Theatre

UNICEF and partners support national theatre festival to empower youth with HIV prevention knowledge

Mbabane, 7 August, 2007 – UNICEF gathered with partners UNDP, NERCHA and the Ministry of Regional Development and Youth Affairs to launch the 'Community Theatre for HIV Prevention among Children and Youth' initiative developed by the Swaziland National Youth Council (SNYC).

Designed to reach children at grassroots level, theatre competitions will be held in each of the nation's 55 *tinkhundla* (constituencies) throughout the year. The competitions will focus on issues surrounding HIV and its impact on children and youth. Regional winners, as well as one national winner, will be selected.

"We are extremely excited about this partnership for children and youth," said Nonhlanhla Nkambule, communications officer for UNICEF. "Children have the right to participate and express themselves. This competition gives them that opportunity. This theatre forum will help educate our country's young people on HIV and will allow their voices to be heard."

The theme of the competitions is "Be Seen, Be Heard and Be HIV-Free." Children and youth will be expected to create productions focusing on issues of abstinence, the entry points of HIV, intergenerational relationships, child abuse and exploitation.

"Children don't think of the consequences of their behaviour, they simply want the experience," said Marjorie Mavuso of UNFPA. "This project will make them talk about these issues and realize that they may suffer if they don't think about the effects of their actions." She added that she hopes for tangible results and positive behaviour change among youth after the initiative.

The theatre competition was conducted as a pilot project in 2006 and reached 13 constituencies. Its success led SNYC and partners to create a plan to reach children and youth at community level throughout the entire country. Each of the nation's theatre practitioners will play a major role in the competitions, mobilizing children and youth in the communities and assisting in development of dramas. Swaziland Theatre for Children and Young People (SWATCYP), Siphila Nje Drama Society, People's Education Theatre (PET), Communication Arts Network (Pom Pom) and Siphocosini Youth Association are among the implementers of the initiative.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in 155 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.