

Do you know your rights



Voices of Youth
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UNICEF Voices of Youth Chat
Theme: Children and AIDS
Nigeria and Zimbabwe
13 October 2006

Background

Children are hardly the beneficiaries of information especially on subjects like HIV/AIDS. This lack of access to information impedes their understanding of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As partners in the promotion of their rights it is important for them to participate in discussions and programmes on HIV/AIDS. Their participation start with the knowledge of HIV/AIDS, how it affects children and what children can do in creating awareness and also prevent the spread and care for those who are infected and affected. In consonance with article 13 of the CRC, UNICEF Nigeria and Zimbabwe country Offices organised an internet chat on October 13 on the theme of Children and AIDS.

The aim of the web chat, therefore, was to bring young people together from different countries to talk about how HIV/AIDS affect children, to understand the problems of HIV/AIDS and brainstorm on the way forward. This was planned to enable children and young people's voices to be heard on issues that affect them.

In all 18 children from Nigeria and Zimbabwe participated. From Nigeria 15 children, 13 girls and 2 boys, from five schools, four public Schools and 1 private school were joined by 3 children from Zimbabwe, 2 boys and 1 girl.

Stigma

With regard to stigma, the children noted that stigma compounds the problems faced by children living with HIV.

"It makes the children orphans and it makes them not to socialize with their colleagues, Children have been affected due to stigmatisation and destroy their future. Some of them become thieves and will lack moral support It makes them feel ashamed. It stops their education. They are also affected financially. It can lead to bad friends".

But Esufu (from Zimbabwe) said because he had information he was friendly to the person living with the virus when they met.

Fungai (from Zimbabwe) says "it was a bit scary but I later accepted them"

The children all affirmed; _____

Together we can fight against it

Nigeria how do you mean?

Children are the leaders of tomorrow so they should not be stigmatized

Yeah! Yeah! Our little idea is to advise them.

Testing

Only few of the children have gone for test but important information that came out of the chat was that in Zimbabwe if you are 16 and below you can't go for HIV test unaccompanied. They queried this.

In our country you have to be above sixteen to get tested so we do not know our status

Well in Nigeria, anybody can go for the test. Age doesn't matter

ZIMBABWE

NIGERIA

"In Zimbabwe you have to go with a parent if you are below sixteen."

"I think they do it so as to protect young people who cannot handle their status."

"Does it mean that anybody below 16 can't know if he has HIV? "

Taking action to raise awareness and build life skills

The children who participated in the chat from both countries said they help to raise awareness on HIV/AIDS and build life skills by pasting cardboards about HIV/AIDS in the school premises, organizing

campaigns in their schools, passing information during assemblies through the Anti-AIDS and Child Rights clubs.

We do drama, poems singing during community gatherings

They also read press news during school assemblies.

What do you mean by press news?

It means reading out news put together by press clubs in schools.

In Zimbabwe there is Young Persons care programmes, where young People talk to communities and help families affected HIV/AIDS.

What happens in the Anti Aids, Citizens Child Programme and Child Rights Clubs?

They learn about their rights, pass information about aids and its effects educate young people on HIV, debate and perform role plays, learn about children's rights and how to be active citizens in their communities and counsel those living with HIV. They also create interactive classes on how to fight for their rights

Girls

The children also agreed that girls are more vulnerable HIV/AIDS because:

“they are mostly referred to as sexual instruments, they face more abuse than boys and are victim to rape and other sexual activities”

“In Zimbabwe girls are more vulnerable because they look after the household and have to find money for food and so (are) abused.

“Girls are fashionable and can go to any extent like doing manicure and pedicure in any place and borrowing unsterilized sharp object to look fine”

Access to drugs, care and financial support

Noting that cost was a problem, the children called for quick access to drugs, care and financial support, friendliness and de-stigmatization for Young People Living with HIV/AIDS, “We should be available for

them when they need our help, counsel them, encourage them because they are people like us and give them psychological support”

The children said they would like to see AIDS orphans provided with school fees, food, shelter and clothing as well as “orienting them so that they don’t be a liability to the society”

UNICEF’s Voices of Youth (<http://www.unicef.org/voy/>) is an Internet portal created by UNICEF for young people who want to know more, do more and say more about the world, and which links children and young people from over 180 countries with an opportunity to explore, discuss and take action on complex human rights and development issues.