

Brief Report “HIV Prevention Consultation” with Young People” on the UNICEF Website “Voices of Youth (VOY)”

In consultation with UNFPA, 3 questions were developed, and put up in a new VOY discussion board, called “Global Consultation on HIV Prevention, within the HIV/AIDS domain. The three questions were:

1. What is being done in your country to stop HIV from spreading among young people? What has been effective for young people? Do you think that what is being done is enough? If not, why not and what do you think could make it better?
2. What activities or projects for HIV prevention are not available in your country but should be? Why do you recommend these activities or projects?
3. What needs to happen for more young people to be involved in stopping the spread of HIV in your country?

The discussion board was opened on Monday 28 February and was closed on March 15th. All registered VOY users who posted on an HIV thread since April 2004 were sent an e-mail on the consultation and encouraged to respond. Two messages were sent out to the HIV Focal Points in country offices to inform their youth service partners. There were a total of 364 views of the 3 questions, with a 9.3% posting rate.

On the VOY Home page, a poll was established in English, French and Spanish with the following question:

“Do young people in your country know about HIV and how to keep themselves safe?”

As of March 14th the results were:

- ⌘ English: YES - 53.9%, NO - 46.1% (546 votes)
- ⌘ Spanish: YES – 59.3%, NO – 40.7% (118 votes)
- ⌘ French: YES – 70.6%, NO – 29.4% (109 votes)

The results seem to suggest that young people know enough about HIV and the “how” of prevention. Most recent surveys, including the data contained in the 2004 Global AIDS Report, suggest a different reality in a number of countries. It is difficult to interpret these results, beyond suggesting that they are young people’s “opinion” and may contain a “right answer” response bias. In future, using more of a knowledge based quiz question may be a more effective format, or a combination of questions to better validate the responses, as the majority of young people who posted on the consultation boards suggested that young people did required more information and skills and opportunities to participate in the response.

The National Response

Key Findings -- Question One: What is being done in your country to stop HIV from spreading among young people? What has been effective for young people? Do you think that what is being done is enough? If not, why not and what do you think could make it better?

A number of young people indicated that not enough was being done on HIV prevention, especially for young people. They suggested that more could be done in

secondary schools to train and mentor students on HIV/AIDS prevention as schools were not effectively addressing the issues. It was also suggested that adults also lacked basic information, so they were unable to inform their children, and this lack of knowledge contributed to stigma in the community. Young people therefore said information campaigns were required for adults and that these should address issues of stigma and discrimination. The lack of knowledge was not limited to HIV prevention, but also general sexual health, and a number of the young people called for more information on issues of reproduction, STI, contraceptives and prevention choices.

Young people from the high prevalence countries of Kenya, Nigeria and Uganda, said that they and their peers recognized HIV as a serious problem. They indicated that there were on-going national activities, but that more effort was required. They called for improved coordination and more effective leadership and more effective ways to reach young people, like peer education, the use of mass media and messages through non-governmental organizations. They also suggested a need to increase the involvement of churches and the communities in the response, including in counseling and care and support for young people living with HIV.

There was some debate about the ABC messaging. Some young people felt there was not enough open discussion on sexual health and condoms, while others thought there was too much emphasis on condoms and not enough on conduct. Access to "all" information was the key point made by a number of young people, who felt that their governments were not providing all of the information or limiting the focus. There were also a number of young people who believed that there was not enough emphasis on promoting the delaying of sex and faithfulness in relationships.

"How are we supposed to fight HIV if even sex is not a completely open subject?"
Female, 17, Brazil

Some of this discussion also focused on the need to increase the participation of young people in the response. This included a need to develop their capacity through workshops, seminars and talk shows and as peer educators. In addition, they also called for organizational support and increased access to resources for youth groups.

Activities & Projects

Key Findings -- Question Two: What activities or projects for HIV prevention are not available in your country but should be? Why do you recommend these activities or projects?

A number of the young people indicated that although there were activities "for" young people, these activities had not been designed "with" young people, and in many cases young people were not the implementers. The key point was for programmes to become much more "youth friendly" in their design, their implementation, their channels and their messages.

There was also a concern that some of the programmes failed to recognize the reality of young people's lives, one example from Trinidad & Tobago, mentioned the government focus on "Abstinence Only Clubs", which did not meet the needs of those young people who were already sexually active.

"I have never seen an advert on the prevention of AIDS or HIV anywhere"
Female, 15, UK

A number of young people called for more use of TV and radio to pass on prevention information. Others called for more community based drama, street theatre, seminars and forums. Some suggested supporting community libraries with internet access. There was a discussion about using cell phones and sending text messages, but this had a mixed response.

The issue of appropriate languages was raised, along with the need to ensure that information materials and services were easily accessible. Community radio was seen as an intervention which needed more support, as it would allow for young people to participate in developing the programmes and it would therefore produce messages and address issues which were relevant to the local community.

In addition to addressing prevention, young people said that information on radio and TV should also make HIV real, by interviewing young people living with HIV and showing their day to day lives and by presenting their feelings on the whole issue.

A lot of young people called for schools, especially high schools, to be providing health and sex education. They recognize that many people oppose sex education because they are not comfortable with it, that parents may not want their children to participate and that teachers may not be comfortable with the topic of sex education. A number of young people also said that HIV prevention education and sex education should be started early, in junior primary school.

“Young people need to be educated, and it is the responsibility of the educational system to equip them to prevent the further spread of HIV.”
Female, 18, USA

On the issue of the ABC of sex and HIV prevention, a number of young people said that more time and energy was being spent on debating which ABC should be the priority, instead of making stopping the spread of HIV the priority.

Young people also called for more access to HIV testing, including free, confidential testing. Strengthening health services for and with young people at local levels and the strengthening the response and linkages within communities was another set of activities young people identified. This also included efforts to address stigma in the community and initiatives for working with young people who are living with HIV.

Let's talk about Action

Key Findings -- Question Three: What needs to happen for more young people to be involved in stopping the spread of HIV in your country?

The key issue for young people was the creation of opportunities for them to participate in prevention programmes. This included local programmes and national programmes. To do this young people asked for more training programmes, capacity development activities, mentoring, sponsorships, and to be treated as equal partners with adults in the design and implementation of programmes.

The need for more meaningful youth-adult partnerships and the support of community leaders and families were identified as areas which need more support.

A number of young people called for the involvement of celebrities in HIV prevention campaigns, individuals who are popular with young people and good role models.

In terms of HIV prevention information in schools, a number of young people called for more interactive and participatory ways of learning about HIV and sexual health. They also suggested that there should be programmes in school which develop a whole set of skills which will help young people avoid risk behaviour.

We as the youth are not the leaders of tomorrow but today's"
Female, 21, Kenya

Other young people said that HIV prevention programmes should also address drug use which might put young people at risk.

How mass media could be made more youth friendly was a common issue. More ways to get information to young people were suggested, like using media popular with young people, like comics, teen magazines, pop stars, cartoons, radio shows (phone in and soaps) and TV shows. Young people also wanted to take part in the information campaigns and in the design of the messages.

Young people also asked for more programmes which would empowerment them to participate in prevention activities. They also wanted to be provided with skills, like employment skills, which would address some of the underlying causes of their vulnerability, like poverty.

Summary

Responses came from the USA, UK, France, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Lao PDR, Trinidad & Tobago and Brazil. In a number of cases the same young people responded more than once. In terms of the main questions, the discussions seem to function more effective when the moderator posed specific questions, or when young people ended up debating each other on specific issues.

Global Consultation Data:

- ⌘ Total: 15 individual posting users
- ⌘ Gender: 8 girls, 6 boys, 1 did not disclose
- ⌘ Age: Between 15 - 26 years, with a relatively even distribution
- ⌘ Countries: 1 user each from Brazil, France, Kenya, Lao PDR, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda, UK, and 3 from the USA and 5 from Nigeria
- ⌘ Posts: 41 posts -- 20 by the girls & 18 by the boys (3 by the user who did not disclose gender).

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 thousands of 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. *Voices of Youth* <http://www.unicef.org/voy>