



AUGUST 2006 NO. 23

HIV/AIDS: SPEAK OUT AND ACT NOW

This edition of the *Voices of Youth* newsletter comes on the heels of the XVI International AIDS Conference held in Toronto, Canada from 13-18 August 2006. An estimated 24,000 delegates from some 170 countries, including more than 1,000 young people, gathered at the conference to exchange ideas, knowledge and research to inform future HIV and AIDS programs. On *Voices of Youth* members have also dedicated significant time and thought to a debate on how to curb the spread of HIV and the role they see themselves and their peers playing in this struggle. The following newsletter gives a summary of their views, reflections and suggestions for action.

OVERVIEW

Young people on *Voices of Youth* focus their discussion on HIV and AIDS on the impact the virus and disease have had on their present, and will have on their future, lives.

Members speak of the affect HIV and AIDS have had on their personal behaviours, families, communities and countries and how they see themselves as integral to the struggle to curb its spread – both locally and globally. They offer concrete suggestions to help promote awareness around the disease, giving particular attention to the value of peer education and offer schools as an entry point for awareness building. They name certain populations, specifically young girls and injecting drug users as more vulnerable to HIV infection, and brainstorm ways to limit these groups' exposure to the virus. In addition, some VOY members share their experiences working on HIV/AIDS awareness, skills and services and suggest new strategies for getting other children and young people involved.

While VOY members see themselves and their adolescent peers globally as key stakeholders and change makers, they feel that many children and young people are not taking action because of either apathy or lack of correct information. The members

of *Voices of Youth* are trying to reverse these trends by using the global VOY community to better understand the virus and inspire change and action around the world.

For more information contact: Amber Oliver, Coordinator, voy@unicef.org

YOUTH INPUT SPOTLIGHT



UNITED STATES

Unite for Children, Unite for AIDS!

Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS!
So our problems sink like a ship.
And the goodness joyfully embraces the world,
And a way to help we will grip.

When the heat intensely burns the bare desert,
We'll find water somewhere so near,
And our strength can give us that power,
To destroy AIDS, and never to fear.

And if one day, the snowfall comes to blind us again,
We'll be strong, and fierce like the Sun.
Because we'll be all determined together.
So, let's unite against AIDS everyone!
girl, 16

NEW ON VOY

EXPLORE

Get ready for the Swahili version of the HIV and AIDS game: What would you do?

SPEAK OUT

[Have your voice heard!](#) Help review the UN Guidelines on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime.

TAKE ACTION

Don't miss your chance to have your photograph featured in this year's State of the World's Children. [Enter the photo contest: inspirational women.](#)

FROM OUR ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

"This [International] Youth Day 2006, let us pledge to keep our efforts going and intensify the effort to make this world a better place. The youth of today are citizens of tomorrow, let us promise ourselves to make an effort to help our fellow beings and make this world a better place to live in." *boy, 17, India*
[Join the discussions!](#)

COMING SOON ON VOY

Searchable database of links and contacts from around the world

UPCOMING ISSUE
Life Skills

HIV/AIDS: SPEAK OUT AND ACT NOW

ISSUES IN CONTEXT

August 2006

Click on a link to read what young people are saying about HIV/AIDS

[Building awareness & schools](#) [Behavioural change](#) [At risk populations](#) [Gender](#)
[Taking action](#) [Conclusion](#)

BUILDING AWARENESS & SCHOOLS

First and foremost, young people agree that HIV prevention strategies should start with awareness building. They recognize the importance of spreading accurate information about the etiology of the disease, the relative risk of infection, prevention methods and treatment options for those infected with HIV. VOY members believe that this is particularly important for those living in areas where HIV prevalence rates are high.



KENYA

"The threat of HIV is ever tightening its hold on the third world countries, because of the lack of resources and, sadly, because of negligence. Education is perhaps the most powerful of these resources that we so desperately need in the fight against this disease. If people were taught what it is, how it kills, when and how it is transmitted, and most importantly, how to protect themselves from it, there is no doubt the odds would tip in our favor." *boy, >21*

VOY members see schools as a key entry point for education and awareness about HIV and are demanding the inclusion of HIV/AIDS education in the curriculum and openness to discussing such sensitive topics.



INDIA

"When I was in my private school [in India], the health education was more of a joke to most of the students. Whenever I asked questions about it, everyone in the room would be shocked and make fun of me. The teachers would also hesitate to answer my questions. The answer they always gave me was, 'See me after class.' It was so irritating." *girl, 16*



MALAYSIA

"In Malaysia, sex education is not encouraged in schools. Even though it is taught, the teacher will only touch on the subject quite vaguely and it is mostly brushed off. We are also not encouraged to talk openly about sex and very often, frowned upon if we bring up the topic." *girl, 20*

One VOY member expressed concern regarding early school drop-outs in some regions and proposed a solution to address this problem.



UGANDA

"I think sex education at an early stage - maybe starting at 5 years due to school dropouts - is the only way to help in solving the problem because it is going to equip the youth with information, which definitely includes protective measures." *boy, >21*

VOY members recognize that for some children and young people, particularly the most vulnerable or marginalized, a formal education is out of reach. They also feel that children and young people living in rural areas have access to little or no information about the virus and how it is spread. As such, they place importance on the need to reach out and disseminate information to young people not attending school and those living in rural areas. VOY members suggest that the best strategy is peer education.



INDIA

"A young person who has correct information on HIV/AIDS just needs to tell others around him/her. They should

form a network of sorts, passing on the information. This would ensure that the information spreads rapidly among the large population of youth in India." *girl, 18*



LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

"In public there is so little information provided and advertised on the issue of HIV/AIDS prevention [in my country]. In rural areas, which are the major part in our country, there is less information provided to the public. That's why many people in those areas have no idea about the virus and its prevention." *boy, >21*

While some VOY members talk about a lack of information in their communities, others speak of an overload of information, and are concerned that this has provided a false sense of security for those at risk of infection.



NIGERIA

"The issue of AIDS has been overflogged so much that people, especially here in Nigeria where I come from, tend not to believe in the existence of AIDS any longer. They are of the view that since the issue has been overstressed for so long, perhaps it wouldn't be as deadly as it is said to be. Or it could probably be a biological weapon of mass destruction, intended to wipe out the 3rd world countries. How then does one convince people that AIDS really exists? If they cannot be convinced, then there is every tendency that there would be an explosion in the number of people infected with AIDS in the near future." *girl, >21*

BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE

VOY members recognize that protecting oneself against the virus requires significant behavioural changes. Whether they are aware of it or not, their suggestions for behaviour change directly echo the ABCs of HIV prevention: Abstinence, Being faithful and Correct and consistent condom use.



INDONESIA

"I don't really think that people (teenag-

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ers) all over the world are taking HIV and AIDS seriously. I have found quite a few of my friends that reject to use a condom when they are having sex. They have a few reasons such as: they don't feel comfortable using a condom, they are too embarrassed to buy condoms or they believe their partner doesn't have AIDS. In some cases, I ended up being the person who went to the drug store to buy condoms for my friends." *girl, 21*



GABON

"Ladies and gentlemen we are also responsible. I wonder if one day people, young in particular, could give a good sense to 'love like before'. We change girlfriends or boyfriends like our shoes, meals... Our relationships also suffer. Please let's review our consideration and the meaning of 'love' and maybe we'll understand why making love has been created." *boy, >21*

In their discussion of behaviour change, members also reference the importance of self-confidence and a good self-image, and the need for life skills to negotiate peer pressures.



SOUTH AFRICA

"...you [should] not give in to peer pressure and the 'I love you, let's do it without protection,'.... If a person truly loves you then she/he would not force you to do something that might kill you. So to all those young people out there, LOVE, HONOR AND VALUE YOURSELF AND YOU ARE ALL BEAUTIFUL INSIDE AND OUT." *girl, 21*

AT RISK POPULATIONS

HIV has the potential to affect anyone. However, there are specific sub-populations, due to a number of factors, who are most-at-risk and especially vulnerable to HIV infection.

According to the UNAIDS 2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic, the four most at risk populations are: sex workers; men who have sex with men; injecting drug users (IDUs); and prisoners. VOY members share their awareness of the problems surrounding injecting drug users.



UNITED STATES

"With the IV drug users, what has been done in some communities here is that they provide them with clean needles, since it is so hard for them to stop the addiction. Clean needles are provided, they are taught not to share needles and to sterilize them. If we cannot prevent intravenous drug use we can prevent the transmission of HIV from one to the other." *girl, >21*

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the use of contaminated injection equipment during drug use is the major route of HIV transmission, and accounts for more than 80% of all HIV cases. Young people on VOY are aware of this trend and are alarmed.



CROATIA

"One of the biggest problems is the spreading of HIV among adolescents in Eastern Europe through re-usage of needles. The population of intravenous drug users is increasing and a lack of needle exchange programs, inadequate education and the frequent problem of unprotected sex really poses an issue! What can we do for our peers?" *girl, >21*

GENDER AND HIV/AIDS

HIV infection rates around the world are not consistent in terms of their affect on males and females. In some countries, where injecting drug use is driving the epidemic, males are hardest hit. While in other regions, for example some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, females suffer the highest rates of infection. Young people on VOY commented about their female peers, suggesting that societal norms limit their access to and utilization of information and services as well as curtail their decision-making power and capacity to adopt the ABCs of HIV prevention. VOY members urge young girls to stand up for themselves.



MALAWI

"All information should be directed at everybody irrespective of our sex. And also we should revisit our traditions as

gender inequality poses a great threat to females' health. They have no tools on how they can protect themselves with many options in favor of men, i.e. use of condoms." *boy, 21*

Participants on VOY are aware that, in some cultures, harmful traditional practices may place females at risk of contracting the virus.



MALAWI

"There are many factors that accelerate the spread of the pandemic amongst the youths in Malawi. These include traditional or cultural practices such as chokolo [wife inheritance], fisi [the practice of a man coming to sexually initiate a young girl after her first menstruation], kulowa kufa [cleansing rituals] and kuchotsa fumbi [an initiation ceremony that may include unprotected inter-generational sex], just to mention a few. Therefore, the best way to protect girls from being infected with HIV/AIDS is to first civic educate local communities on the dangers of continuing with cultural rites that promote the spread of the pandemic." *boy, 21*

In addition to expressing concern about the impact of HIV on females in some countries, VOY members recognize that women often bear the brunt of caring for sick and dying adults and for supporting children who have lost their parents to AIDS.



CROATIA

"I believe that gender inequality poses a great threat to women health (including adolescent, mother and child health). Women have no tools on how can they protect themselves and their family. And when the infection occurs, the burden is again laid upon the women!" *girl, >21*

TAKING ACTION

The incidence and impact of HIV/AIDS is not evenly distributed throughout the globe, and some VOY members are more at risk than others. But despite their varying levels of risk, all VOY participants are eager to take action. Even

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those living in countries with a very low prevalence of HIV infection demonstrate a strong desire to get involved and spread awareness.



UNITED STATES

"At my school, my friends and I founded a chapter of Student Global AIDS Campaign. Last year, we brought a speaker from Malawi into our school. He spoke to all 650 kids at my school about the things he sees everyday (he runs a community center for orphans). I literally had about 200 kids come up to me and tell me how much the speech affected them and how they are going to be super careful about HIV/AIDS. I think when kids hear the truth, they wise up to HIV/AIDS. Just talking does a world of good. Once kids understand how bad it is, they are more likely to be careful." *girl, 18*



SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

"On Valentines Day I helped in handing out stickers ensuring the use of condoms. I gave them to students at my college. We put on plays about AIDS, hand out posters and pamphlets on how HIV and AIDS are spread and how to prevent the spread, how to treat persons with AIDS. We are trying our best to ensure that the spread of AIDS is contained. Truthfully speaking I don't think there is anything else we can do to stop the spread of AIDS. Right now, it is up to the young men and women to care enough to protect themselves and take a stand for something positive and fight." *girl, 17*

Other VOY members are actively reaching out and spreading awareness to their peers living in the rural parts of their countries. Often HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns are less focused on rural areas because rates of infection are lower there than in urban areas. As such, VOY members are plugging a gap.



NIGERIA

"I believe it is very essential to have the rural persons educated on HIV/AIDS.

So much has been done at the urban centers leaving the rural people with very little knowledge on HIV/AIDS, apart from the basics. I am working with an organization that is researching HIV/AIDS called CD2BN. And one of my projects is focusing on taking it to the locals especially here in Nigeria. It is also clear from the information collected that there are still myths and stigma on it. But with much dissemination of information the people have been educated about what HIV is, what AIDS is, transmission methods, ARTS, importance of VCT, how to form support groups that have helped provide hope for both for the infected and affected." *boy, 21*

In addition to spreading accurate information and building awareness, VOY members are participating in HIV/AIDS fundraisers.



UNITED STATES

"My friends and I are participating in AIDS Walk Los Angeles 2005, a momentous fundraising event held annually in West Hollywood. Many students at my school are walking together as a team (there are about 100 of us); our fundraising goal is \$15,000. Events like this one are a great way for people of all ages and backgrounds to unite and combat HIV/AIDS together as a community." *girl, 20*

CONCLUSION

Across the globe, there are approximately 6000 new HIV infections every day among young people. Some of the VOY participants see this statistic from a distance, through news media and education programs in their schools, but many are familiar with its suffering and tragedy on a personal level. Whatever experience they have with the virus, members of VOY are united in their determination to help.

For more information, read past newsletters from *Voices of Youth*:

[June 2004: Young people and HIV and AIDS: "An ounce of prevention equals a pound of cure"](#)

[December 2002: HIV/AIDS and young people](#)

A-Z of HIV for young people

- A: Avoid pre-marital/casual sex
- B: Be faithful to your spouse
- C: Consistent condom use with your partner
- D: Don't share sharp objects like razors, clip pers, needles, and syringes etc.
- E: Encourage and care for people living with HIV and AIDS
- F: Feasible HIV campaign ideas should be shared with the right people and not shun
- G: Get tested and know your HIV status
- H: HIV does not kill
- I: Insist on sterilized objects if you must share
- J: Just don't ignore simple safety measures
- K: Kick against stigmatizing people living with HIV (PLWH)
- L: Learn how to live happily and stay alive
- M: Make HIV treatment available and affordable for PLWH by advocating for them
- N: No knowledge is a waste
- O: Operating with an "I don't care attitude" puts you at risk of being infected
- P: Protect yourself and others by living responsibly
- Q: Question HIV issues and policy if you are in doubt
- R: Remember HIV and AIDS are two different things
- S: Sex education is a topic you must never shy away from
- T: Talk to a trained and experienced counselor for more information about HIV
- U: Underestimating your chances of contracting HIV with risk behaviour is risky
- V: Verify your first HIV test result by taking another test
- W: With media support, accurate information about HIV can be effectively disseminated
- X: Xerox A-Z of HIV and AIDS and share with other young
- Y: Yes! We can have an emergence of a HIV free youth population if we work together
- Z: Zipping up is still the most effective & reliable way of protecting yourself from HIV
girl, 20, Nigeria

VOICES OF YOUTH

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

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.

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YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROFILE: JENNIFER EHIDIAMEN

“Although awareness, education, diagnosis and treatment for HIV/AIDS are still low in many regions, I believe that if efforts are put together, there can really be emergence of a HIV free youth population. Young people must learn to make themselves available to take positive action on issues that affect them and learn to work together for maximum impact.”

BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer Ehidiamen is a 20 year old member of Voices of Youth. She is also an active voice in her home country, Nigeria, and is a promising leader in the international HIV/AIDS community.

INTRODUCTION

Although I have been learning a lot on VOY and in the Article 2 group and doing a lot of activities around youth related issues, the opportunity to really take action came when I got an opportunity to serve as a youth intern at Journalists against AIDS (JAAIDS), a media resource center on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.

ACTIVITIES

My first project at JAAIDS was coordinating a youth roundtable and brainstorming session with about 19 young people from different youth organizations, and a one-day youth seminar themed “Youth and HIV/AIDS” which brought together 44 youths active in community development work, HIV positive youths, youth journalists and experienced facilitators. Midway through my internship in JAAIDS, I was selected to take part on the Global Xchange programme, a six month international volunteering programme which gives young people in Nigeria (Jos) and United Kingdom (Birmingham) an opportunity to work together to develop valuable skills and to make practical contributions to our local communities. We organized various activities including a street campaign in Birmingham for the 2005 World AIDS Day, a school-to-school presentation to reach out to students in Jos, and a play about HIV infection at the Jos Prison.

ARTICLES

My first published HIV article in a local newspaper is titled “Street talk: Youth and HIV/AIDS” and suggests that if the MDG Goal 6 (which aims to “combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases”) is to be achieved, youth need to be empowered and given support and opportunities to enable them reach out to their peers with accurate information.

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AIDS 2006 YOUTH PRE-CONFERENCE

Toronto Youth Force ambassadors from around the world gathered on Thursday August 10 at the University of Toronto, Faculty of Medicine for the AIDS 2006 Youth Pre-Conference. The purpose of this event was to ensure successful youth participation during the AIDS 2006 Conference to be held at the Metropolitan Toronto Convention Centre August 13-18, 2006 in Toronto, Canada.

Youth Ambassadors were brought together to help figure out what can be done collectively to reach a 2005 target whereby 90% of youth worldwide would be knowledgeable of HIV transmission.

Current UNAIDS statistics report only 1 in 3 young men and 1 in 5 young women have knowledge of how to prevent HIV transmission. "We are alive today and we need to create some change", said Mary Otieno, Technical Advisor on Young People and HIV/AIDS for UNFPA.

The goal of the Toronto Youth Taskforce for the AIDS 2006 conference is to facilitate the collaboration of stakeholders committed to HIV/AIDS issues and to empower youth to be effective participants in the conference.

[Click here to read more!](#)

[<http://youth.aids2006.org/en/home.html>]