

The Empowering Africa's Young People Initiative

A Holistic Approach to Countering the HIV/AIDS Pandemic

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The HIV/AIDS pandemic, the worst mankind has experienced, continues to be the most important challenge facing Africa - one that has exacted a heavy toll on human lives and affected all aspects of development. AIDS is more than a public health problem; it is a crisis in education, economics, civic, social and security systems. Young people are at the heart of the pandemic with an estimated 8.5 million young people, ages 15-25 living with AIDS in Africa. To stem the further rise in infection rates, prevention, care, access to treatment, support and advocacy strategies that are strategically focused on youth, combined with interventions aimed at the communities in which they live, offer an effective way of mitigating the impact of the disease.

In an unprecedented collaboration, seven global youth organizations have joined together to create the "Empowering Africa's Young People Initiative" – an inter-generational, multi-sectoral program that seeks to empower young people through holistic approaches to prevention, care, access to treatment and support. The organizations are:

- The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- World Association of the Girl Guides and Girl Scouts
- World Organization of the Scout Movement
- World Alliance of YMCAs
- World YWCA
- International Award Association
- International Youth Foundation

Together, the seven organizations and their networks directly represent more than 100 million young people worldwide, of whom over 20 million are members in Africa. In addition, these youth organizations and their networks indirectly reach another 200 million in Africa. The power of these youth networks to reach scale at such unprecedented levels is unparalleled. Such an alliance brings a great added value in the fight against HIV/AIDS such as:

- Ability to reach scale, reaching up to 20 million or more youth in Africa through effective programs
- African-led and African influenced with deep community ties
- Access to young girls and women and ability to address their vulnerabilities
- Reach to young boys and men to improve their social and interpersonal skills
- Ability to reach out school youth through its non-formal educational focus
- A holistic approach, to prevention, care and support
- Powerful in advocacy against stigma and discrimination and for youth interests with consistent messages
- Ability to influence behaviors in young people in the long term through a sustained effort that reaches across generations
- Complementarity of programming and opportunities for learning from strengths of each other
- Access to existing infrastructures and tools for reduced transaction costs
- Legitimacy and political will of its leadership, and supported by UNAIDS and UNICEF
- Supported by the Harvard School of Public Health with whom discussions are on-going.

The overall **goal** of the Empowering Africa's Young People Initiative is to reduce HIV/AIDS transmission among young people, ages 10-25 years over a period of five to fifteen years in selected Sub-Saharan African countries. During the initial five years, the program will be implemented in Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia as a pilot program. Starting in the third year, the program will extend to other countries such as Senegal, Togo, Mauritius, Rwanda, Madagascar, South Africa,

Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire and Zimbabwe, among others. Beyond Africa, the Initiative has the potential to be replicated in Asia or the Caribbean in countries that have been equally affected by the pandemic.

The specific **objectives** of the Initiative are to:

- a. Scale-up existing effective HIV/AIDS prevention programs to reach more young people;
- b. Expand care, access to treatment, support and opportunities to those already infected with the HIV virus to improve their quality of lives;
- c. Build the capacity of volunteer-based, grassroots, youth organizations to design and implement more effective youth-focused HIV/AIDS prevention programs; and
- d. Increase youth knowledge and skills to protect themselves from the HIV infection, other STIs and unwanted pregnancies.

The Initiative will work at two levels. It will expand programs and services for youth, and it will strengthen the capacity of the national affiliates to deliver these scaled up programs. For youth, interventions will be age-appropriate, and targeted. The multiple needs of the growing numbers of AIDs orphans and child-heads of households will also be addressed by engaging them in on-going programs that accommodate their needs, rather than in discrete programs to minimize the risk of stigma.

The alliance is committed to the following **underlying principles** that are embedded in all the interventions:

- Youth are agents of social change, not passive targets of information, and are central to the Initiative through their involvement in design, implementation and evaluation aspects
- Using holistic approaches to prevention, care, access to treatment, support and advocacy against stigma and discrimination within and outside the alliance member organizations
- Empowering young girls and women especially in the fight against HIV/AIDS
- Involve and support people living with HIV/AIDS in all aspects of the program

Thus, the priority **interventions** for young people will focus on:

- Strengthening Youth – Expanding lifeskills and values formation programs
- Skills-based Peer Education – Expanding peer-to-peer education programs to ensure requisite skills are built and linking with appropriate youth-friendly services.
- Advocacy – through open dialogue that raise awareness of harmful cultural practices and advocating against stigma and discrimination with one voice and with consistent messages
- Livelihoods – approaches that provide marketable job skills development and income earning opportunities for young people, as well as strengthen community safety nets by providing the similar income earning opportunities to orphans' caregivers, child heads of households and families weakened by the disease and the famine.

The selected interventions will equip young people with information and the necessary lifeskills to put knowledge into practice. It will also seek to address the underlying conditions of poverty that further perpetuates the disease by tackling issues of livelihoods, discrimination against those infected and advocacy for better laws and enforcement of existing benefits for orphans and widows.

The approach to implementing these interventions will consist of scaling up existing good practice programs of the participating organizations to ensure expanded coverage to underserved areas and underserved groups of young people, including orphans and vulnerable children. Joint activities will be undertaken on advocacy and awareness raising issues to bring more force to the messages being promoted. Country coalitions will be strengthened through coaching and learning by doing.

The Initiative plans to form a national coalition of the affiliate organizations in that particular country. Thus, in the five pilot countries, the five national coalitions consist of a total of 28 organizations. The **interventions** aimed at the organizational level will focus on strategic capacity building, through joint training and technical assistance activities, to enable these mostly volunteer driven organizations to:

- Improve their organizational skills in basic management, communication and financial management and reporting, curricula development, teacher training and improved advocacy skills.
- Strengthen the collaboration and workings of the country alliances through ongoing coaching.
- Peer learning on best practices or effective programs for youth through networking and exchange of ideas, sharing assets, and documenting and disseminating what is working well in prevention, care and support.

The overall desired outcome is a decrease in the prevalence rates among young people. Specific measurable outcomes will be established for each country.

The Initiative will take a decentralized approach to monitoring and evaluation to assist managers at the country, regional and global levels to make decisions and report on common process and impact indicators. Overall, the plan will use baseline assessments, program monitoring at various levels, process and impact evaluations. The Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) is supportive of the Initiative and discussions are being finalized to define their role in developing the monitoring and evaluation framework and operations research.

The Initiative will develop an operations research agenda to address the knowledge gaps on youth development and HIV prevention, and to respond to the critical issues facing project participants. In this effort, HSPH will collaborate with the Alliance members and leading African Universities to implement, document and broadly disseminate.

The major activities of the Initiative are structured at global, regional and country levels with global and regional offices, country affiliates and networks of the seven organizations mobilizing to deliver on key objectives and interventions. The Initiative's Global and Regional Secretariats will support and strengthen the country activities through results-oriented grantmaking, capacity building, operations research, impact and process evaluations and facilitating the sharing of best practices.

In August 2002, a Stakeholders' Planning Meeting in Kenya, funded by USAID, Finnida and the 7 organizations, brought together 56 leaders from the 28 organizations in the 5 countries. This resulted in the development of country coalitions, a strong commitment to collaboration, a decentralized structure and clarification on methods of operation. Thus the Initiative's strategy for implementation will begin in these 5 countries and incrementally expand to 15 countries in Africa over 5 years. Given the extreme urgency of the situation, the focus of the first year will be to expand existing effective peer education and lifeskills programs to underserved areas to narrow the gaps in information, education and services through scale-up grant funding. Joint activities will focus on advocacy and awareness raising campaigns. In subsequent years, there would be an increased exchange of good practices, capacity assessments and the provision of technical assistance to scale up livelihoods programs for youth.

The projected budget for the Initiative is an estimated \$48 million over five years for operations in 15 countries with over 80 national organizations, regional and global activities. No one funder is expected to support the whole Initiative; rather the alliance members seek to build partnerships with funders from bilateral and multilateral agencies, private foundations, the corporate sector and individuals.

The pan-African "Empowering Africa's Young People Initiative" offers significant benefits to donors,

- Ability to reach young people at an unprecedented scale,
- Cost-effectiveness in using existing structures, systems and models,
- Outcomes in reduced the infection rates for youth and enhanced capacities of national youth organizations in designing and implementing more effective prevention programs
- Contributes directly to the Millennium Development Goal for Combating HIV/AIDS and indirectly to other targets set for education and reducing poverty.
- Increased donor visibility through global communications strategy