



Lentswe La Rona

Newsletter of the Young African Advocates for Rights
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The red T-shirts - Who are they?



Lentswe La Rona is born!

The Youth Coalition (YC) in partnership with Youth Against AIDS Network (YAAN) facilitated an advocacy workshop around Sexual and Reproductive health rights in Lusaka, Zambia, June 2003.

For the past week, we a group of 12 young African advocates have been reunited to have a strategic meeting about developing our own, unique network. Whilst developing and launching this network, the YC has ensured that we are able to attend the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

In the past week we have created our vision, mission, objectives and our principals and values whilst agreeing on the structure of the network and electing a steering committee. We have strategised a plan of action for the next year that we will follow through with! YC and YAAN have been here to empower us with encouragement and facilitate part of the discussions during the past week.

Lentswe La Rona is truly an African youth network. Our vision is to have a society

where African youth know, access and exercise their rights and participate at all policy and decision making levels regarding issues that affect these rights, in particular their sexual and reproductive rights.

Lentswe La Rona is ‘Our Voice’ in Tswana. We hope that our young African voices will be heard and taken seriously at this meeting and that the partnerships we build here will go from strength to strength as will our network.

So watch out for the red T-shirts!
Come and talk to us because we would love to talk to you!

Sophie Dilmitis (Zimbabwe)

Lentswe La Rona
Young African Advocates for Rights

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The Mocambican youth delegate



An interview with
Alexandre Muianga

Alexandre (25) is one of the few youth in an official delegation to this ECA meeting. He was invited to be the youth representative of Moçambique by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, because he is the coordinator of AMODEFA (Associação Moçambicano para o desenvolvimento da família), the largest community programme on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Moçambique, funded by UNFPA.

For four months, Alexandre has been preparing for the ECA, mainly by collecting information from different Ministries and contributing to the National Report of Moçambique. His most important task was to ensure that there is a youth perspective in the National Report. Since he is representing the Moçambican youth, Alexandre met with a large number of Moçambican youth organizations to discuss their main issues and concerns.

His expectations for ECA are to see the rights of youth being implemented at all levels. Alexandre will make a strong plea for youth participation in all decision-making levels and he is also determined to address the main problems that the youth in Moçambique are facing; teenage pregnancies, lack of youth friendly services, lack of youth centres and lack of treatment and ARVs for young people who are HIV positive.

Fortunately, Moçambique displays a positive attitude towards young people. According to the Governmental Strategic Planning, the most important way to combat HIV/AIDS is to empower youth. Also, since 1999, the Moçambican government has been implementing youth friendly services, however, these do not reach all youth, especially those in rural areas.

The Moçambican government is open to listen to issues that young people raise and they indicated to need the concrete and creative ideas from youth. Moçambican youth are on their way to becoming better organized and are gaining more skills regarding their rights and how to fight for them. Our youth delegate Alexandre is full of hope that governments will recognize and promote the rights of the African youth.

Saskia Husken (The Netherlands)

Less than a dollar a day.....

A quarter of the world's population of 6 billion people live in extreme poverty on less than a dollar a day, of which a large number are living in Africa. Factors such as drought and political conflict on the continent have further tightened the grip of poverty.

The negative economic situation in many African countries have adversely affected efforts to improve sexual and reproductive health with young people, who are often the worst affected. Limited access to social and health services has been a direct result of poverty with countless young people in Africa today having limited or no access to youth friendly reproductive health services.

How many young people have suffered irreversible damage to their reproductive systems because they had no access to treatment for a STI that could have been treated easily? How many young people are HIV positive today because they had no access to quality information on prevention methods?

As young Africans, we constantly see young people engage in risky sexual behaviour such as transactional sex, and we know that there is an underlying reason for such behaviour and that is poverty.

The biggest problem for us now is the question of **HOW** to deal with poverty? We appreciate the numerous attempts by African governments to eradicate poverty but know

also that many of these strategies are not tailored to harness youth capacity.

When interacting with young people in a country like Ghana, one gets a strong sense that the majority of the youth need some kind of livelihood skills in order to help them make a living and overcome poverty in their lives. It is difficult and even unrealistic for a peer educator to attempt to talk to someone about ways of HIV prevention when they have not had eaten for the whole day. As young people involved in peer education we wonder how we can encourage young people to purchase and use contraception when they cannot even buy food.

There is no doubt that equipping young people with livelihood skills is a key strategy in the fight to roll back poverty in Africa. African youth want to contribute their quota to the wealth creation efforts in their countries but they cannot do that without first being equipped.

Edford Mutuma (Zambia)

youth coalition

worki ng i nternati onal l y for
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La scolarisation des filles au Sénégal

Au cours des cinq dernières années, le gouvernement du Sénégal, en collaboration avec les Ministères de l'Éducation et De La Femme, avait lancé une vaste campagne sur la scolarisation des filles.

Il a été remarqué que plus de garçons allaient à l'école que les filles et ceci surtout dans les régions et dans les villages. Ce phénomène se justifie par l'insuffisance des infrastructures scolaires et des centres de formation pour permettre a les filles de pouvoir continuer leurs études après le niveau primaire. A cela s'ajoute certains facteurs socio-culturels visant à privilégier la scolarisation des garçons et non celle des filles. Souvent, à défaut de rester à la maison pour aider leurs mères aux travaux domestiques, elles sont données en mariage très tôt.

En lançant ce programme, le gouvernement a permis aux leaders communautaires et aux parents et même aux chefs religieux de se rendre compte de l'importance de la scolarisation des filles. Ce programme a également permis aux jeunes filles de pouvoir s'affirmer et de participer activement et massivement au développement de leur pays.

Il est vrai que cette initiative est a encourager, mais beaucoup des efforts doivent être consentis pour essayer de gagner le pari. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, le gouvernement devrait plus accentuer sa politique dans les zones éloignées en mettant en oeuvre toutes les infrastructures nécessaires: salles de classes suffisantes, des lycées, des collèges et des centres de formation professionnels. En tant que jeunes, nous espérons que ce défi puisse être relevé pour assurer un avenir meilleur à toutes les jeunes filles du Sénégal en âge d'aller à l'école.

Mimi Tamba & Aicha Doani (Sénégal)

Ou sont les jeunes de l'Afrique du Nord ?

Durant la revue du CIPD à New York, il y avait une voix des jeunes forte qui avait lutté avec succès pour l'inclusion des mots progressifs sur la participation des jeunes et la protection de leur santé et droits sexuels et reproductifs. Quand-même, il avait une maque de la voix des jeunes Africains, et la Coalition des Jeunes, l'organisation qui été crée par les jeunes qui ont participé dans le procesus du CIPD+5, avait mis comme premier but d'augmenter la participation des jeunes Africains dans des réunions internationaux.

Maintenant, cinq ans plus tard, après beaucoup de travail et de support, la Coalition des Jeunes était capable de faciliter l'inclusion des jeunes avocats Africains professionnels et entraînés. Dans le but d'assurer que les gouvernements Africains prennent la responsabilité pour les promesses qu'ils ont fait et de planifier pour le futur. Mais il y a toujours un manque de représentation des jeunes d'une sous-région importante; l'Afrique du Nord.

Pareil que le Sahara divise plus que seulement la terre de l'Afrique, et c'était difficile d'attirer et d'entraîner des jeunes progressifs d'Afrique du Nord, pour quelques raisons. La sous-région ne s'identifie pas toujours avec l'autre partie du continent de l'Afrique, et souvent, elle a des relations culturelles, économiques et géographiques plus fortes avec l'Asie de l'Ouest. Les sujets importants des jeunes de l'Afrique du Nord peuvent être différents que telles de leurs pairs-relées dans le Sud. En Afrique du Nord, il y a une prevalence des Infections Sexuellement Transmissibles (le VIH/SIDA inclus) et des grocesses involontaires plus bas que dans l'Afrique sub-Sahararienne. Aussi, la pauvreté absolut et plus bas. Mais, il y a aussi beaucoup de sujets pareils, comme l'inégalité du genre, un manque de d'éducation sexuelle comprehensive et des pratiques traditionnelles. En plus, il y a des barrières de la communication et le nombre des jeunes activists travaillant sur les sujets de la santé et droits sexuels et reproductifs est limité. Le resultat est qu'il y a un manque de jeunes de l'Afrique du Nord à cette conférence.

La Coalition des Jeunes reconnait cette limitation, et est concentrée à continuer de faciliter et supporter l'inclusion des jeunes mal-représentées à des conférences comme celle-ci.

Tanya Baker (Canada)

Gender Equality is a Matter of Pride

Often, we stand up and declare with pride that we are African. How can we proudly pronounce to the world that we are African when young women and children's rights are still being denied?

When a baby is born, its sex determines its opportunities and advancements in life. As I stand in the heart of Africa I wonder how long I should suffer and feel inadequate because my education is not as important as that of a man. If all humans are equal, why should I and not my brother miss out on empowerment opportunities, such as basic information and education around sexual and reproductive health rights?

How can we proudly pronounce that we are African when we do nothing about the gender based violence that continues to thrive in our midst? When customs and traditions frown upon women who disclose the injustices they endure in their own homes instead of supporting them.

How can we be proud when women and children of our nations are being taken from their homes to be sold as commodities, when the trafficking of young women and men still prevails?

The economic status of women still remains low and the privileges of land and cattle ownership still remain beyond their reach. Governments have to go further than merely recognizing that women's rights are an integral part of development to committing to ensuring that women enjoy these rights. When women begin to enjoy their rights, then and only then can we proudly declare that we are African.

Nompumelelo Mbatha (South Africa)

Wala Nalungwe (Zambia)

Are you giving young people what they need?

Uganda is one of the only countries in Africa that has turned their infection rate around from 30% to below 8%. They realised very early on that prevention messages that have a strong focus on morality issues don't actually work and ostracise a vast majority of the population. Having realised this, they began to send balanced preventative messages that cater for all types of people. These were *Abstain, be faithful and use condoms (ABC)*.

Many people feel that talking to young people about sex, sexuality and condoms promotes promiscuity. Studies have shown that if you talk to kids about sex and sexuality and the risks, including how to practically use condoms, they are more likely to delay their first sexual experiences or abstain. If they do decide to have sex, they will have the knowledge of how to practise safer sex. It is not about *if* young people today are having sex. It is a question of *when* will they have sex and will they be protected?

Peter Piot said *Adults need to work with young people and not for them*. Young people have the creativity and energy to be at the forefront of preventing further HIV infections. They should be involved at all decision and policy-making levels. They need to have a voice, be listened to, and be taken seriously. Governments should include youth in devising and implementing prevention messages for young people; after all, they know what messages will work best for them. Due to the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS, adults, like parents and teachers, do not feel comfortable discussing issues relating to HIV and AIDS. Young people need encouragement and guidance as well as the correct information – all of which I believe is currently lacking in most countries.

It is **vital** that youth today have all the facts and not just the information we think they are 'ready' for. Young people have sex for exactly

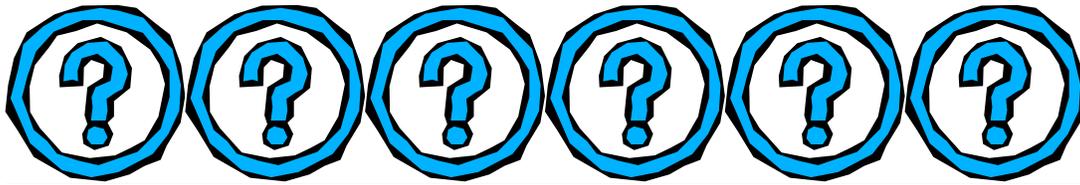
the same reasons that adults have sex. It feels great, it's wonderful to connect with another person and, like adults they too are experiencing, experimenting and exploring each other's bodies. We also know that beginning a sexual relationship too early can be devastating if one or both parties are not mature enough to deal with it. How will we know if we are ready if no one talks to us about sex? Aren't your actions encouraging us not to discuss the dangers of having sex, especially unprotected sex? It is high time that you take your heads out of the sand and look at the realities of the situation and provide accordingly.

Youth today need:

- Education and information about HIV/AIDS
- Knowledge and skills on to how to prevent themselves from contracting the virus and how to prevent further infection
- To be able to assess the risks, weighing up the pros and cons of abstaining, delaying sexual intercourse or beginning a sexual relationship
- Self-efficacy – to feel that they will be able to follow through with decisions that they make with regards to their sexual and reproductive health
- Knowledge of their rights, including their sexual and reproductive health rights
- The opportunity to discuss difficult issues surrounding HIV and AIDS in an open and transparent manner.

I am not against abstinence. It is **100% risk free** and you do not achieve that any other way but I strongly believe in giving youth all the facts and allowing them to make their own decisions about their lives that they will have to live with and then bear the consequences thereof. How will young people know what the consequences of their actions are if you do not provide them with all the facts.

Sophie Dilmitis (Zimbabwe)



Where are the North African Youth?

During the ICPD five year review in New York, there was a strong youth voice that successfully advocated for the inclusion of progressive language with regard to youth participation and the protection of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. However, there was a noticeable lack of African youth voices, and Youth Coalition, the organization formed from the youth presence at the ICPD+5 process, had a primary mandate to increase the participation of African youth at such meetings.

Now, five years later, with a lot of work and support, the Youth Coalition was able to facilitate the inclusion of trained, professional African youth advocates, in order to hold African governments accountable to the commitments they have made and to look forward to the future. But there is still lack of youth representation from a important sub-region of Africa, North Africa. The sahara desert seems to separate more than land, and it has been difficult to attract and train a progressive youth voice from North Africa for a variety of reasons. The sub-region does not always identify with the rest of the African continent, and often has stronger relationships culturally, economically and geographically with countries of West Asia. The predominant issues of young North Africans with respect to sexual and reproductive health and rights can differ from their peers to the south. There is a lower prevalence of sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies and absolute poverty in North Africa than sub-saharan Africa, however, there are also many similar issues including gender inequality, lack of comprehensive sexuality education and

harmful culture and traditions. Moreover, communication barriers and few identifiable youth activists working in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights has lead to the lack of North African youth advocating at this meeting. The Youth Coalition recognizes this limitation, and is committed to continue facilitating and supporting the inclusion of under represented youth voices at important meetings such as this one

Tanya Baker (Canada)

Ignorance

**I went to high school and graduated,
I know all about grammar, reading and writing.
Heaps of books, literature, science and language,
I scored high and even received a reward.**

**I went to high school, but I know nothing, nothing.
My body is a secret to me.
Epitome of a generation left to themselves,
Victims of censorship and inhibition.**

**What do I know of reproduction?
From histories, imagination, trial and error,
What's the use of knowledge, for the sake of knowledge?
Epitome of a lost generation,**

**Thus, I was trapped in the net of a young man who made me pregnant.
I don't know what to do now.
Why did nobody inform me before?
Ignorance! Oh, ignorance.**