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Jugend, Lebensperspektiven und HIV-Prävention

Young Africans in Tanzania and Switzerland winning in the 2005 Scenarios from Africa contest

"Have fun, learn about HIV/AIDS, and change behaviour"

Von Dorothea Coppard, Ricarda Merkle und Claudia Kessler Bodiang

In March 2005, young Africans all over the continent and for the first time in selected European countries were writing their story lines for short films on HIV/AIDS in the frame of the contest Scenarios from Africa. The Swiss Centre for International Health of the Swiss Tropical Institute (SCIH/STI) was involved in coordinating the contest in Switzerland in the frame of the Afrimedia project (1), and in Tanzania in the frame of the PASHA project (2).

In the previous rounds since 1997 almost 40,000 adolescents and young women and men from 25 African countries had participated in the Scenarios from Africa contest. The 2005 contest broke all previous records by far: a total of 63.327 young people from 35 countries took part in this 4th edition of the contest. The contest is coordinated by Global Dialogues Trust, a charity registered in England with a coordination office in Burkina Faso. The contest calls upon young people up to the age of 24 to create stories for short films on HIV/AIDS. Winning ideas are turned into awareness-raising films by some of Africa's best directors. With a distribution that tops other African cinema, the short films created from these screenplays by Africa's most distinguished directors reach millions of viewers across the continent and beyond. These films are then shown on national TV channels, in schools, at the community level and are used by mediators in Africa but also in Switzerland when doing their peer education work.

Daniel Enger, co-founder and co-director of the project, says they were inspired by the successful French project "3000 scenarios contre un virus" (3,000 scenarios against a virus) that used screenplays of school children to make short HIV prevention films with celebrated French filmmakers. Enger saw how a group of bored French teenagers who had sat stony-faced through other sex and HIV/AIDS education films broke into noisy laughter as they watched an elderly couple buy condoms. The laughter turned to tears as a young woman told friends at her birthday party that she had HIV. The films sparked lively discussions among the teenagers about their own lives.

“Everyone working on Scenarios from Africa has fun, is learning about HIV/AIDS and some are making behaviour changes that could save their lives.” The project allows youth to take the lead in educating their peers and the public about HIV prevention and about the epidemic's impact in their communities. Scenarios from Africa does not only result in a change of awareness and behaviours amongst youth. It also impacts at an organisational level triggering communication, creating synergies and strengthening collaborative networks between the involved organisations and stakeholders.

Filling the gap to young Africans in Switzerland

No short films exist yet addressing the particular context of African migrants in Europe. To fill this gap, the 2005 contest for the first time included migrant communities and received contributions from young Africans living in France, Belgium and Switzerland. The Swiss contest was organized by the Afrimedia team in close cooperation with some of the cantonal AIDS associations who received briefings and materials including videos, posters and flyers of the contest and in turn promoted the contest through their own channels. There was substantial support from Global Dialogues Trust, especially with regard to videos, guidelines, financial support for the prizes, etc.

The Swiss contest was promoted mainly through face-to-face work of mediators who tried to gain attention and interest of the target group and then explain how to participate in the contest. Mediators received a half day training explaining background, objectives, responsibilities and procedures of the contest. Within their normal work, they then contacted young people as well as parents or key resource persons to identify participants and then assisted the adolescents and youth in the development of the scenarios.

For Switzerland, the possible danger of stigmatisation through the contest turned out to be of concern both to the mediators and participants. They feared that the focus on the link between Africans and HIV/AIDS could further contribute to the existing climate of stigmatisation and discrimination against this group of migrants. This was taken into account when elaborating flyers and a poster.

Reaching and motivating the target group in Switzerland turned out to be quite a challenge in this relatively short time frame. Based to previous experiences from African countries a high number of contributions was anticipated. Surprisingly, motivating young Africans in Switzerland to participate turned out to be quite different, not only due to the above described fear of stigmatisation. When first contacted, the reaction of the youngsters and parents was always very enthusiastic. However, participants had to be followed up tight to get a scenario written and handed in. Another hindering factor was the fact that young people living in Switzerland have many activities in their spare time. Most other contests only demand sending an SMS or ticking a box instead of concentrating on producing something for hours. It became also obvious that the prizes offered were not significant enough to motivate youth (usually they go

for winning a Mercedes Benz... without calculating the chances of winning). Finally, only few contributions were received - not an impressive result in terms of quantity, but a clear success when looking at their high quality. As a highlight one of the participants in the Swiss contest was later selected as one of the 30 international winners. In Tanzania at the same time, more than 800 young people participated and produced 434 scripts related to HIV/AIDS.

He started laughing, saying that of course he would not use a condom. Nowadays this is not necessary as there are medicines to cure HIV/AIDS. And anyhow, this girl was so pretty – he knew how an HIV infected woman looks like, he sees them at Langstrasse. I put forward all the arguments I knew but he only shrugged – “Come on, we are here to have fun” - In this moment I really appreciated that my girlfriend and me would have an eye on each other and jealously would look out. (extract from scenario by Oliver Stäubli, Switzerland)

“Yes, but you see the disease of Carlos (the son) is not like other diseases. It is a disease which makes the whole family sick. The Swiss African Society, of which I am the director, is now looking suspiciously and is spreading rumours about me and my family. Nobody is visiting anymore. Can you imagine, this place used to be crowded at weekends, people discussing the common migration problems or asking for advice.” (extract from scenario by Calixte Knitter, Switzerland)

And the winner is...

As in many other African countries, the contest organisers in Tanzania were rewarded with a much higher turn out in terms of scenarios. In Tanzania, the contest was organized by the PASHA project together with the American Red Cross and Student Partnership Worldwide (SPW). Altogether more than 800 young people participated and produced 434 scripts related to HIV/AIDS. Some of these were based on personal experiences; others explored creative approaches to the problems associated with HIV/AIDS – such as how to convince a friend not to engage in risky behaviour. There were no Tanzanian contributions among the 30 international winners, but three were among the top 60.

Some of the Swiss scenarios revealed stories from the home country context, but many also included the migration context, speaking about difficulties of coming and living as an African in Switzerland, about life and attitudes of African communities in Switzerland, etc.

The international winner Cadicca Waldburger from Basel wrote a scenario covering the story of a young woman who fell in love with a Swiss man during his holidays to her home country. He invited her to Switzerland with a lot of promises. Soon after her arrival in Switzerland, it turned out that he was already married and she found herself in the red light district trying to make a living. It did not take long until she discovered that she had been infected with HIV... We do not quote from this story or reveal the ending, since Scenarios from Africa may use it to turn it into a short film.

In both countries, after juries had made their selection, prizes were handed over during special ceremonies. Winners read parts of their scenario to the audience. In addition to a cash prize, all winners received a certificate, a medal and a copy of the last collection of Scenario videos. In Tanzania two of the scenarios were performed by a young artist group. For further use of the scenarios in HIV prevention, a cartoonist was contracted to turn one of the winning stories into a comic strip to be then distributed to schools.

While washing, the mother keeps on thinking on how to counsel her daughter about how to prevent HIV/AIDS infection. All of a sudden she sees a condom in her daughter's clothes. The mother is very happy and is no longer worried. (extract from scenario by Mariam Mhina, Tanzania)

In the morning on the other day, Jimmy was on the play ground. He told his friend that the day before, he slept like a log and he did not fulfil the promise with that girl because he was very tired. Chale laughed very much and told Jimmy that exercises help someone avoid unnecessary sexual allure. (extract from scenario, Tanzania)

Currently, the process of adapting and testing draft scripts for the shooting of the 2007 Scenarios from Africa collection is in full swing. Plans for the next contest include a special focus on the Great Lake peace process. Ideas on developing migration specific videos are also further explored. A next contest round will take place both in Africa, and hopefully again in Switzerland in early 2007.

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Notes:

1. Afrimedia is an HIV/AIDS prevention project for Sub Saharan African migrants living in Switzerland, implemented by the Swiss Tropical Institute and the Swiss Red Cross and financed by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health. The pilot project ended in April 2006. A next phase will be implemented by the Swiss AIDS Association, with support from the SCIH/STI.

2. Prevention & Awareness at Schools of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania (PASHA), under the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, which receives funding as part of German development cooperation through GTZ. The project is implemented by the Swiss Centre for International Health of the Swiss Tropical Institute.



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