



On the Record: Against AIDS in Africa

Issue 3: Building the YAA Network, December 5, 2001

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From the AP Editorial Desk: From a Dream to a Network

This issue describes how Youth Against AIDS (YAA) has grown from a student's dream to a network that now links 18 countries in Africa.

YAA was the brainchild of a Kenyan student, Lydia Bosire. Like any intelligent young person growing up in Africa in the 1990s, she understood that AIDS posed a mortal threat to her country. She also understood that Kenyan society had to confront the complicated issue of sexuality among youth.

She took this conviction with her to college in Great Britain where she went to study for an International Baccalaureate. She found that it struck a chord with others. They came from different countries and cultures, but they all understood that the threat to young people is universal.

The first to get involved were Lydia's personal friends at college. One of them, from Great Britain, took on the task of developing YAA contacts in Africa. A Tunisian student designed the first YAA website. The task of maintaining the website was taken over by a friend from Senegal.

This core YAA group has set itself two goals: first, develop a network of contacts in every African country; second, define clearly what it means to 'engage young people' in the fight against AIDS and develop a youth action plan. The two go hand-in-hand. Once the network is in place, its members can use the action plan to lobby their governments.

YAA has already made great strides. It now has representatives in 18 countries in Africa. (Several have contributed to this series). This year alone YAA has lobbied at three major UN conferences and drafted a report that could serve as the basis for international agenda for youth and AIDS.

Such an agenda would need to be adapted to each country, but the idea has already proved its use. Moses Imayi, a well-known Nigerian activist, met with YAA's core members at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on AIDS (UNGASS) in June and agreed to represent YAA in Nigeria. In August he convened a meeting between youth groups and the press in Nigeria. The meeting was well covered, and Mr. Imayi will now use the platform to press the government into integrating young people into Nigeria's national AIDS strategy.

YAA is also catching on in the north. Seventeen universities in the United States and Europe now have links with YAA. Several hope to raise funds to support projects in Africa that YAA's African representatives have identified.

All this suggests that the vision of YAA as an international network is taking hold and starting to produce results. Information technology (IT) is critical to its success. Not only does IT help members of the YAA network communicate, it also helps to spread the word about AIDS.

YAA's Youth Ten-Point Action Plan - the one they drafted at UN meetings this year - includes a call for IT to be more widely used in schools. YAA's members have grown up with the Internet, and they are now turning to it for help.

They have even brought some of their tech-savviness to the preparation of this series. For the first time, we have directly connected a series of 'On the Record' with a website. The web map of YAA's African contacts is also an innovation.

This helps to explain why The Advocacy Project (AP) has made a significant investment in YAA this year.

AP's investment in YAA does not come cheap for a group like ours, which has a very slim budget. But from our perspective, this is a rock-solid investment. AP was set up to support the information needs of advocates who are working for peace and human rights, and the members of YAA's network fall squarely into that category. They are battling for the rights of young people - to be heard, to be healthy, and to be free from discrimination.

Equally important, they are going about it in a professional manner. YAA's core members have used our grant carefully and sparingly, without expecting any payment for themselves. Most important, they have produced high quality products under pressure. Anyone who has worked in Africa will know how difficult it is to cover a subject as difficult and sensitive as AIDS.

This simply demonstrates, once again, the power and the potential of their idea. YAA has shown that when young people set their sights on a goal, particularly one that calls for communication and networking, they can be relentlessly effective.

And that is why, ultimately, YAA is not just about youth. To call this 'an initiative by young people' only tells part of the story. YAA is about opening a new front in the battle against AIDS, and adults should happily surrender the field to people half their age if they get the job done. Age in this fight is irrelevant.

Letters: To Inviolata- 'Your Story is Captivating!'

The following letter was sent in response to the profile of Inviolata Mmbwavi, the Kenyan AIDS activist, which was written by John Kamau of Rights Features in the last issue of 'On the Record' and is now posted in a longer form on the YAA website.

- From Victor Odongo

Inviolata Mmbwavi,

Thanks very much for your struggling in life and your story that I read at the YAA website. It was very encouraging. I would like to correspond with you and maybe I can also get some tricks on how to counsel youths in Nyalenda slum in Kisumu. I am a Univ. Student from Egerton Univ, and a Project Coordinator of a Children Home in Kisumu. . . Your story is captivating and a real encouragement. As we struggle to kick AIDS out of the world, a much stronger network is called for. Please stay in touch.

- From Ebrima Saïdy

Thank you very much for this paper, it is brilliant and helpful to me. I will find time to read it in a more detail context to be able to critically reply to issues raised.

YAA is Featured Partner on a New AIDS Channel

Youth Against AIDS was selected as the first featured partner on a new [One World AIDS web portal](#). The channel was launched on International AIDS Day (December 1).

Lydia Bosire: Ambassador for Youth

'On the Record' profiles Lydia Bosire, the co-founder of Youth Against AIDS.

AIDS policy must be designed around the special needs of youth,' says Lydia Bosire, the Kenyan founder and president of Youth Against AIDS. 'We are not the problem. We must be part of the solution.'

This is the message of YAA, and for Lydia Bosire it is intensely personal.

In some ways this is surprising because Ms. Bosire is very different from the young Kenyans who are most at risk from AIDS. She is not a product of the streets. She did not throw caution to the winds and take sex partners while still in her teens. In fact, she will tell anyone who listens that she believes in abstinence before marriage.

She comes from a loving family, not a broken home. Her father is a professor and her mother a teacher. She won entry into one of the best schools in Kenya, Loreto High School in Limuru. After Loreto she won a national merit scholarship to complete her high school education (fifth and sixth forms) in the United Kingdom. She then won a scholarship to Cornell University in the United States. She hopes to study for a Master's at Cambridge.

This may not be the face of deprivation and alienation, but partly because of her distance from Kenya, Lydia Bosire sees the AIDS crisis with utter clarity. She can also express her opinions with confidence and conviction. This combination makes her a highly effective international spokeswoman for the network of articulate young Africans who make up YAA.

It has certainly been an exciting year for this 24 year-old student. In between studying for exams, writing papers, and holding down two jobs to pay for expenses arising from her work with YAA, Ms. Bosire has attended three major UN meetings in New York and Senegal, visited YAA projects in Kenya and Uganda, drafted an international action plan, written editorials, met with the wife of the UN Secretary-General and the wife of Uganda's Prime Minister, and overseen the production of this series of 'On the Record'.

It has been quite a year, and it still is not over. As this issue of 'On the Record' is being written, Lydia is making plans to meet a senator or two in Washington, DC. Just thinking about it makes one feel slightly overwhelmed.

This is a young woman of amazing energy. What makes her tick?

Education in the Broadest Sense

The short answer is that 500 Kenyans a day are dying from AIDS, and most are her age or younger. It is an incredible thought, and it makes Lydia Bosire angry. Very angry. The words come tumbling out as she insists that young Kenyans have been abandoned to their fate.

Kenya has come late to the threat. It was not until November 1999 that Kenya's President Daniel Arap Moi declared a national emergency. This contrasted with neighboring Uganda, where President Yoweri Museveni (alerted to the national danger by the spread of the virus among his army veterans) launched a national campaign in the late 1980s. After suffering the highest rate of infection in the world, Uganda is now one of Africa's success stories, as its infection rate is falling fast.

It is falling, says Ms. Bosire, because everything is out in the open in Uganda, particularly sex education. Sexuality among young people is a taboo subject for many societies, and Kenya is no exception. But, says Ms. Bosire, AIDS does not allow us to be squeamish. 'Sex is too important and dangerous to be ignored.'

Ms. Bosire herself has a strong personal moral code, and this comes out in some of her writings for this series. She visited the University of Nairobi for the preparation of this series and was outraged to find that some students her age were prostituting themselves to earn a few dollars, without taking basic precautions. (Her report can be found in Issue 5 of this series.)

But moralizing has nothing to do with policy. Young people are sexually active; 'they need education, not lectures.'

By this Ms. Bosire means education in the broadest sense. Education, she says, is much more than the transfer of facts at school. It is the way that young people absorb lessons throughout the most formative period of their lives - from adults, from society, and from each other. An expansive definition of education is critical to understanding how to combat AIDS.

When Ms. Bosire was growing up in the Kenyan town of Kisii, the message was all about abstinence. This was reinforced by the Catholic Church and by Kenyan religious leaders.

This attitude lives on among older Kenyans who still see AIDS as a crisis of morals rather than as a public health emergency, and it astonishes Lydiah Bosire. 'Our parents frown on sex before marriage,' she said. 'But this is completely unrealistic in this day and age.'

The pressure discourages young people from seeking advice from family planning clinics, which are supposed to be leading the fight to prevent AIDS. 'There is no incentive to find out about AIDS, take preventive measures, or get tested for the virus.'

She makes the same point about formal education. 'The emphasis is all on grades and exams,' she says. Yes, children will study sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in biology, but as an academic exercise. There was no sex education in the high school at Loretto where Ms. Bosire went to school.

Personal Loss

Ms. Bosire hopes that Kenya's education system has changed since she left the country, but suspects it has not.

She also admits that her own education has been hardly representative. But even while she was finishing high school in Great Britain, she could not escape the AIDS crisis in Africa. Late in 1999 her mother phoned to say that one of her favorite cousins, a 27 year-old teacher named Henry Nyabuto, had died from the disease. Her mother seemed embarrassed and unwilling to accept the reason for Henry's death. She said simply: 'We've lost Henry.' The fact that Henry had been a teacher and as such responsible for educating children seemed to make the conversation even more difficult.

Henry's death has caused some tension between the two branches of the family, says Lydiah. She herself remembers Henry with affection.

Studying in the United Kingdom freed her from the daily preoccupations that face young Kenyan women, such as finding a husband and a job. 'It is difficult to focus on AIDS when you're under such pressure,' she says. 'Being in Europe, I could see it all so clearly.'

At the United World College, Ms. Bosire met several others whose support would prove crucial. Rebecca Maina was another student who had been at school with Lydiah in Kenya, and the two young women spent many Welsh winter nights discussing the stuffy attitudes of their elders and church leaders back home in Kenya. 'Here we were, away from the constraints of society that would be appalled by the very idea of sexual education, in a position to do something about it.'

But do what? They began brainstorming with their friends and the idea of a youth network began to take shape. One of those drawn in was Leo Metcalf, a British national who was raised in Madagascar, where his father worked for the UN Development Program. (Leo is now program director of YAA and largely responsible for building the network of African contacts.) Naim Dargouth, a Tunisian student whose father worked at the World Bank, agreed to design a YAA website. World Voices, the site of the United World Colleges, hosted the site.

The precise shape of YAA began to emerge when Ms. Bosire when attended an international meeting of students in Prague in 1999. She listened to other students pontificate about 'Africa's problems' but heard nothing about AIDS. She spoke out strongly and publicly about her disquiet:

'How could this be, when I had lost a cousin to AIDS? When another five young Africans had been infected in the time it had taken the delegates to read a statement? These were five sisters, brothers, neighbors, and friends. We needed to give AIDS a focus. The idea of a Youth Against AIDS was born.'

The Power of Networking

From the day of its creation, YAA's message has been that dialogue between young people can slow the spread of AIDS. This makes networking a goal unto itself, and Lydiah Bosire has certainly mastered the art. She buttonholed the wife of the UN Secretary-General at one UN meeting.

She also received an invitation to visit from Mrs. Nsibambi, the wife of the Prime Minister of Uganda, whose daughter is also at Cornell University. Their meeting in Kampala was short but poignant because Mrs. Nsibambi was called away to the funeral of a close relative who had died from AIDS. The Prime Minister's wife told Lydiah that she hoped Kenya would learn from the mistakes of Uganda, and that Kenya would not have to wait until every family had buried someone before the country took action. It was a sobering conversation, and another reminder that this disease is the great leveler.

After a busy year, YAA goes from strength to strength, sustained by the urgency of its message, the enthusiasm of its members, and the appeal of networking. YAA has representatives in 18 African countries. Seventeen northern universities have opened YAA chapters or are trying to raise funds for YAA projects in Africa. Ms. Bosire recently formed yet another partnership with

the Student Global AIDS Campaign (SGAC), which advocates for more engagement in the fight against AIDS in the United States.

YAA's growth seems as effortless as the click of a mouse. But appearances are misleading. Just ask Leo Metcalf and Lydiah Bosire about the late nights, the endless drafting, and hours of instant messaging with Senegal. It requires stamina as well as enthusiasm to sustain this level of engagement.

- Visit the [United World Colleges website](#).

Educating Teachers

The following extract is taken from a recent report by Human Rights Watch on the impact of AIDS on children in Kenya. It confirms some of Ms. Bosire's own concerns about the formal education system.

In 2000, after years of resistance to HIV/AIDS curriculum in schools, especially on the part of church organizations, the Kenyan Ministry of Education, supported by a parliamentary mandate, finalized and distributed curricular materials for both primary and secondary schools on HIV/AIDS. These consist of a summary description of the syllabus and some materials on basic facts about HIV/AIDS prepared for primary classes 1-3, 4-5, 6-8, and secondary school students. There is also a facilitators' guide that lists objectives and main points of the various lessons covered in the class books and notes other resources that teachers can consult.

Several teachers and headmasters interviewed by Human Rights Watch noted, however, that teachers regarded the guidelines for using the curricular materials as incomplete. 'Right now teachers don't know where to begin in using the curriculum,' said Francis Kandege, headmaster of Nyanganga Secondary School in Siaya. 'Teacher training will be the most important thing,' he said, and government training on the new curriculum has not yet reached all provinces.

One head teacher also noted that, as in many countries, HIV/AIDS is not part of the examinable curriculum in Kenya - that is, the national exams that drive primary and secondary school promotion do not include this material. A number of schools visited by Human Rights Watch had informal clubs to combat AIDS that reach some students with information and guidance. One recently published survey of young persons aged 13-19 in Kenya concluded that teachers were an important source of information on AIDS for students, but not through the government sex education program, which was judged to be virtually nonexistent.

The HIV/AIDS curriculum should be particularly helpful for reducing incidents of abuse and stigmatization in the classroom and at school. Among children interviewed by Human Rights Watch, the few who were able to stay in school after a parent became ill with AIDS were sometimes subject to abuse there. 'When our mother was sick and couldn't care for us, all of us had to drop out of school. First we tried to stay in, but when we were irregular in attendance, we were caned [beaten by a teacher] for that,' said Rose B., age eighteen, whose mother died in 1999. 'My children come home from school saying that the other children abuse them because of my illness,' said Linda R., an HIV-positive mother in Nairobi.

Even when all Kenyan schoolchildren are able to benefit from the new curriculum, there will remain the challenge of reaching over four million school-age children who are not in school. The PCA survey classified the young persons interviewed as 'high-risk' or 'low-risk' with respect to HIV transmission based on a number of criteria related to their knowledge and reported behavior. Of those ranked as low-risk, only one percent were out-of-school youth. Of those ranked to be at high risk of HIV transmission, 39 percent were school-aged children not in school. Comprehensive information on programs for out-of-school youth in Kenya is not available, but this population is clearly both difficult and essential to reach.

There is a need for all available channels of information, including school-based curricula and programs for out-of-school youth, to be put to maximal use with appropriate and clear information on HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and care. Children and adults alike have a right to 'freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds,' as noted in article 19 of the ICCPR [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights]. Information on HIV/AIDS is a matter of life and death.

- Read the [full report by Human Rights Watch](#).

Young Delegates are Excluded as the UN AIDS Summit Calls for Youth Participation in the AIDS Crisis

The YAA network began to take shape at this year's Special Session of the UN General Assembly on AIDS. UNGASS drafted a visionary declaration that calls for young people to be involved in the fight against AIDS - while at the same time discouraging young people from formally participating in the actual conference. The snub acted as a spur and accelerated the creation of the YAA network.

The Special Session opened in the last week of June against a background of controversy. It ended a week later with a ringing declaration and a pledge to commit at least \$10 billion to the international fight against AIDS.

For most observers, this represented a triumph after a rocky start. Some governments from Europe and Latin America had proposed specific protection for high-risk groups such as 'men who have sex with men, sex workers, and drug users and their sexual partners.' This language proved too explicit for the Vatican and United States. Egypt even proposed condemning 'irresponsible sexual behavior.'

In the end, a gay representative was allowed to address UNGASS, and compromise language was found for the declaration. This required some notable concessions. Conservative Islamic governments were persuaded to endorse a call for family planning (including the 'expanded access' of male and female condoms). The declaration also recognizes the reproductive rights of adolescent girls, which has proved difficult for right-wing 'pro-family' American lobbyists. The government of Cuba was persuaded to drop its demand that the conference criticize the U.S. blockade of Cuba (a standard Cuban demand at UN meetings) after African governments warned that this might antagonize the United States and jeopardize passage of the declaration.

These concessions suggested that the threat from AIDS is now sufficiently grave - and sufficiently well understood - to override political animosities, religious taboos, and ideological disputes.

The declaration also acknowledged that respecting human rights is essential because it 'prevents stigma and related discrimination' against people living with AIDS. This sort of language represented a huge step forward in understanding the social causes of AIDS.

Pathetic Performance

While this compromise text was being hammered out in public, scores of young AIDS activists were forced to watch from the sidelines as UNGASS acknowledged the importance of involving young people while making it almost impossible for them to participate.

It began in the run-up to the Special Session. The United Nations held three preparatory meetings to lay the groundwork for the session and to begin drafting the declaration. When 23-year-old Jessica de Ruijter from the Netherlands arrived for a preparatory meeting in May as a member of the Dutch delegation, she was astonished to find that she was the only young government delegate in the room. As she later wrote to YAA, 'You could hardly speak about youth participation.'

Ms. de Ruijter was equally critical about the lack of young people on nongovernmental organization (NGO) delegations, which she described as 'pathetic.' Some 150 NGOs attended the May meeting, but only one NGO (Advocates for Youth) worked specifically with young people and even its one delegate was not taken seriously by other NGOs. 'If even the NGOs do not want to listen to young people, how can we ever convince our governments?' asked Ms. de Ruijter.

It all amounted to a lost opportunity. 'I was quite frustrated because the negotiations started. That was the time when we could have influenced the text of the declaration the most.' The situation improved when the next preparatory meeting took place in June, prior to the Special Session. But by then, says Ms. de Ruijter, it was too late to have any input into the draft declaration.

Looking back, Ms. de Ruijter still wonders whether all this was deliberate. 'I don't now know if the adults leave the young people out on purpose. I think that they just do not think about it.'

Her own government, that of the Netherlands, was the honorable exception. Earlier in the year, well in advance of the meetings, the Dutch government had written to all youth organizations in the country and asked for a youth representative. Jessica was nominated by her organization, the Dutch Council on Youth and Population, which is run by young people and advocates for sexual and reproductive rights of young people in the Netherlands.

Drafting A Youth Platform

Young activists found it difficult to participate at the Special Session itself because each NGO was allowed only four delegates. The high profile of the meeting ensured that each slot was much in demand. There was a further limitation: to qualify, an NGO had to have a formal

relationship (accreditation) with the United Nations or a specialized agency such as the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Lydia Bosire was lucky enough to receive one of the four slots from an NGO that knew her from an earlier UN meeting on child rights and was impressed by her energy. But her colleague from YAA, Leo Metcalf, was less fortunate. He was limited to working outside the UN headquarters with other young activists who had gathered in New York but were also barred from attending.

In the end, Ms. Bosire and Mr. Metcalf divided up the tasks. While Ms. Bosire attended the UNGASS, Mr. Metcalf spent many hours in intense conversations with a group of young activists who were invited to New York by UNICEF and UNIFEM (the UN Fund for Women.)

These two agencies at least understood that the UNGASS presented a major opportunity, and made it possible for about 60 young people (from 25 countries) to come to New York. It was here that Ms. Bosire and Mr. Metcalf came face to face with prominent African activists like Itumeleng Thahane, aged 21, from Botswana and Moses Imai from Nigeria.

Meeting at an office in UNICEF, about 30 of them formed an informal youth caucus (lobbying group) and worked late into the night to draft a youth position paper. They were helped by some of the leaders of the Student Global AIDS Campaign, itself an offshoot of Global Justice (the anti-globalization movement). Global Justice was one of several organizations that used the occasion of the Special Session meeting to protest outside the United Nations against globalization. They were particularly incensed at international trade agreements like the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), which make it impossible for poor governments to purchase cheap AIDS drugs.

Different members of the youth caucus took responsibility for drafting sections of the YAA position paper. Ms. Bosire drafted the sections on women and girls, while Ben Wickler, from the Student Global AIDS Campaign, drafted a section on youth and employment. Clayton Lillienfeldt, from South Africa, wrote a section on youth, AIDS, and sports. This formed the basis for a report, which was widely distributed among NGOs after the Special Session.

YAA had achieved its first goal and drafted the beginnings of a youth agenda on AIDS.

'Governments Are Afraid Of Us!'

It was during these few days - and nights - of intense discussion in New York that YAA's African network also took shape. Several of the young people who came to New York in June found the YAA idea appealing and the energy contagious. They agreed to represent YAA in their countries back home.

Leo Metcalf wasted no time. In the weeks following UNGASS, he sent out a blizzard of emails asking his contacts for their impressions of UNGASS.

The overriding theme of their replies was disappointment and anger. 'Youth participation was grossly lacking at UNGASS,' wrote Catherine Ndashe Phiri, aged 22, who works for Youth Media in Zambia.

Sean Barry, 19, from Advocates for Youth, was not sure that the exclusion of youth from UNGASS had been deliberate. 'I think it was reflective of part of the reason why AIDS so heavily affects young people. Within the United States, youth are, in a sense, often considered incomplete adults and are not respected for having independent and valuable insights and perspectives. Without a climate supportive of a youth voice, issues that affect us will be distorted or ignored.'

'I think NGOs really should be leading by example... We need to keep equal pressure on NGOs and governments to ensure young people have a meaningful role in all levels and dimensions of decision-making and program implementation. We cannot be appeased by token representation.'

For Jackline Haynor, 21, from Liberia, it came down to a lack of political will. Ms. Haynor is from the Talking Drum Studio and the Family Planning Association of Liberia. She found it absurd that young people account for 50 percent of the world's population but only one percent of those present at the Special Session.

Bakiono Bagnomboé from the Association for the Promotion of African Youth and Development in Burkina Faso agreed: 'Je pense que c'est désolant. Les jeunes dans tous les discours politiques sont cités comme étant ceux qui sont les plus touchés par la pandémie et que nous ne soyons pas présents à l'UNGASS de façon significative.'

For Mr. Bagnomboe, there were two reasons why young people had been excluded from UNGASS. First, he said, governments are 'afraid' of the outspoken way that young people talk of AIDS. Then, there was the lack of money: 'Nos gouvernements craignent la sincérité et la vérité de notre langage. Il y a également le manque de moyens financiers qui empêchent certains gouvernements d'assurer la participation des jeunes à ce genre de rencontre qui coûtent très chères.'

Vegard Hole from Norway thought that NGOs and governments have difficulty in seeing young people as a resource. 'Many delegations thought: 'Why should we have a youth? Why not also a homosexual, an injecting drug user, a sex-worker?' It is sad that we were not more actively involved.'

Looking back, even UNICEF's brave initiative in inviting young activists had an underhand feel to it. One of the young people invited by UNICEF is well known in her own country for her stand on behalf of HIV-positive people, but she was forced to deny her infection in order to get a visa to travel to the United States for the Special Session. It was one more example of the gulf between the rhetoric and reality - and the challenge that lies ahead.

Vegard Hole, from Norway, felt that in future young people would have to take the initiative and organize themselves in advance of key meetings. 'When an UNGASS or an international conference is being planned, there should immediately begin planning by the different youth

organizations.' Ms. Hole also thought that it would help to have a 'youth office' at the United Nations, as long as it does not turn into 'a hidden passive organization of 30- to 40-year-olds claiming to be if not youth, at least youthful.'

One thing seems clear from these replies: there is an important role for a group like YAA, which can coordinate among young people in advance of major meetings.

For Samuel Tweh, a student from Liberia, there is no time to lose. 'YAA can play a more assertive and facilitating role,' he wrote. 'I feel especially passionate about these issues. Please respond quickly so we can begin soon. The time to act is now.' YAA was in full agreement. Within two months of the Special Session, two of its members were off to Senegal to spread the word at another UN meeting.

'We the Governments of the World...'

The following extract is taken from the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, adopted by governments at the June 2001 Special Session of the UN General Assembly:

'By 2005 (we pledge to) ensure that at least 90 percent, and by 2010 at least 95 percent of young men and woman aged 15 to 24 have access to the information, education including peer education and youth-specific HIV education and services necessary to develop the life skills required to reduce their vulnerability to HIV infection; in full partnership with youth, parents, families educators and health-care providers.' (To download the full text, go [here](#).)

Youth Against AIDS, on the UN Agenda

Leo Metcalf and Lydiah Bosire moved quickly after their fruitful if frustrating experience at the Special Session in New York.

They set their sights on the Fourth World Youth Forum of the United Nations System, which was due to be held in the Senegalese capital, from August 6 to 10, 2001.

As late as July, there were no plans for any special event on youth and AIDS at the forum. Lydiah Bosire set about changing that. She contacted the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and suggested that there should be a special panel on the issue in Senegal. Drawing on the report that had been drafted by the youth caucus at UNGASS, she then drafted a document which she sent to UNFPA, to be distributed at the start of the Dakar meeting. The report set out ten priority areas and was entitled 'Youth and HIV/AIDS: Leadership, Challenges, and Survival.'

The report contained a ringing pledge that young people would 'practice and promote sexual responsibility...' At the same time, it called on those in positions of authority to respect the right of young people 'to choose not to have sex, and if we choose to have sex, the use of condoms.'

Ms. Bosire and Leo Metcalf then set out for the UN Youth Forum in Senegal, where they both networked energetically and lobbied to get AIDS onto the agenda.

Ms. Bosire helped UNFPA organize a panel on youth and health and served as one of the co-rapporteurs. The panelists included Miss Universe and Senegal's Minister for Youth, Modou Fadah Diagne. Ms. Bosire then began working hard to make sure that the YAA report was incorporated into the annex for the final conference report. She was present in the hall when delegates adopted the report and annex by applause. It was a fitting climax to a successful summer of UN lobbying.

Making Waves in Nigeria

Moses Imai from Nigeria was one of the African AIDS advocates who attended the UNGASS and agreed to serve as a YAA representative. He was quick to follow up on his return to Nigeria.

'Moses Imai is really making waves in the fight against AIDS in Nigeria,' writes the Nigerian journalist Tony Adesemoye in a profile of YAA's dynamic representative in Nigeria.

Mr. Imai is coordinator of the Nigeria Youth Action Rangers (NYAR), a group that advocates for young people in Nigeria. He is a familiar figure on the national scene, and he has a reputation for tenacity when he sets his sights on a campaign.

Right now his sights are set on AIDS. After returning from UNGASS to Nigeria, Mr. Imai convened a meeting on August 27 between youth activists and journalists on the impact of AIDS on young people. The meeting ended with an agreement among 30 youth organizations to create a new Youth Against Aids Network (YAAN). Their goal is to avoid the mistakes of UNGASS and see to it that young people are involved in the drafting of Nigeria's national AIDS action plan.

In a communique issued after the meeting, Mr. Imai's organization called for a 'youth-friendly approach to HIV/AIDS program initiative, based on the effectiveness of peer to peer education.'

The meeting also recommended that there should be youth representation in all of the government organizations and agencies involved in HIV/AIDS campaign. 'We are the ones most affected. We who wear the shoe know where it pinches.'

- Email Moses Imai: mosesimayi@yahoo.co.uk
- For the press communique on the August 27 meeting between Nigerian journalists and youth activists contact Moses Imai at eforum@nigeria-aids.org