



On the Record: Against AIDS in Africa

Issue 5: Sex and Sexuality, December 12, 2001

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From the AP Editorial Desk: The Facts of Life and Death

This issue of 'On the Record' deals with the sexuality of young people.

Sexual contact is far and away the most common form of HIV transmission, and this is why it poses such a threat to Africa's youth. Some studies in African countries have found that half of all fourteen year-old boys and 35 percent of the girls of the same age are sexually active.

But sexual behavior is also difficult for policy makers to deal with, because it is so intensely personal. Everyone should be free to develop their own sexual personality on their own terms. In an ideal world, policy making should have no place in the bedroom.

But this is not an ideal world, and in this era of AIDS, sexual behavior is of necessity a legitimate concern for the state and for policy makers. The problem is that when it comes to young people, much of the policy is muddle-headed and wrong.

Start with the facts, which are often willfully misunderstood. No one disputes that people are engaging in sex at an increasingly young age, but many of these sexual encounters are coercive. Millions of children and young people are trafficked into prostitution. Tens of thousands are drafted into war. Millions more work in oppressive working conditions. All of these environments, in different ways, are conducive to sexual exploitation.

Deprivation and poverty are also coercive. Throughout the world, 100 million children under the age of 18 are working the streets. Many of them - male and female - sell their bodies just to stay alive. To many, the long-term risk from AIDS will seem much less important than the daily struggle against starvation.

Deprivation can be a factor even when free choice appears to be exercised. This helps to explain why prostitution is one of the main transmitters of HIV/AIDS in Africa. Later in this series, we will profile some of the young prostitutes who service the truck drivers of Southern Africa. These young women are forced to do what they do by poverty and illiteracy.

It becomes harder to excuse prostitution among college students, who are among Africa's elite. But as this issue shows, even students find it difficult to pay for books and clothes. They, too, resort to prostitution.

Even the family can be coercive and help to spread HIV/AIDS. Within marriage, many young wives are not free to exercise their sexual choice if their husbands take mistresses or determine when and if sex occurs.

All of this has been well established by research, and is reinforced by the profiles in the series. This is not to suggest that all Africans abuse their wives, or that all young Africans are forced into sex. But it does make the essential point that many young people all over the world live in a coercive environment that does not permit them the luxury of choice when it comes to sex.

Society does not help. Young people are bombarded with messages that exploit or demean sex, often for crude commercial motives. At the same time, their church is warning them that sex before marriage is sinful.

They are told that a condom could save their life - yet condoms are often too expensive or sold in insensitive ways that are guaranteed to discourage a teenager. Girls are expected to be submissive and boys to be virile - gender stereotypes of this kind play a huge role in encouraging coercive sexual activity.

Very little effort is made to counter this barrage of conflicting messages with appropriate education in the family, in the school, or in the workplace. Virtually all of the literature agrees that the vast majority of parents find it awkward to teach their children about sex and that when they do it is to urge abstinence. Schoolteachers fare little better; sex makes them tongue-tied.

Is this the sort of environment that allows young people to make an informed choice about their sexuality? Of course not. And adults know it. Still, they persist in expecting young people to 'act responsibly.'

This attitude on the part of adults is more than irresponsible - it is criminally dangerous. It puts enormous pressure on young people who are experiencing a period of bewildering physical and emotional change and then expects them to carry the burden alone.

It is little wonder that young people are, increasingly, turning to each other to learn about the facts of life and death. Peer education is catching on in Africa and elsewhere in the world, and it is certainly one of the few bright spots in the fight against AIDS. Youth Against AIDS (YAA) can help, by spreading the word around its network about what works, and what does not.

This is one more example of how youth can, and should, participate in developing AIDS policy and programs. How unfortunate that it should be happening as a reaction to adult negligence and hypocrisy.

Letters From Mexico and the Central African Republic

- To: YAA, from Juan Antonio Melin, Mexico

Hello,

I'm a youth organization chief...I (would) like to know more about your organization. I'm from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. Thanks, Juan Antonio Melin.

- To YAA, from Desire Dole, Central African Republic.

Je suis beaucoup intéressé par les emails que vous nous envoyez sur la lutte contre le SIDA. J'appartiens à une Organisation qui oeuvre pour le social et le SIDA fait bien partie de notre domaine d'intervention. S'il vous plait aidez-moi à comprendre le message que vous nous envoyez, car vivons dans un pays Francophone la République Centrafricaine (RCA). Desire Dole.

'I am very interested by the emails that you are sending out on the struggle against AIDS. I belong to an organization that does social work, and HIV/AIDS is certainly an important part of our interventions. Please help me to understand your message, because we live in a French-speaking country (the Central African Republic)'

- De la redaction/From the AP editorial desk: Nous sommes en train de produire une version francaise de la site de YAA. Nous regrettons qu'il n'est pas possible de traduire cette serie des emails, a cause d'une manque de fonds. The YAA website is being translated into French. We regret that owing to a shortage of funds, it has not been possible to translate this series of 'On the Record'.

Editorial: Why are My People Dying?

Lydia Bosire, the president of Youth Against AIDS, blames religious conservatives and liberals for creating a false choice between safe sex and abstinence.

Why is my generation dying over a war between those who advocate abstinence and those who advocate condom use?

To me, the alarming statistics about youth HIV infection are more than numbers on a piece of paper. Those people are daughters and sons, sisters and brothers, and friends. I know this because I have lost a cousin to AIDS, because some of my neighbors are infected.

As a young person from a province in Kenya where a third of the youth are HIV-positive, I wish to voice the concerns of young people around the world who are at risk of HIV infection because of misguided policy making concerning youth and AIDS.

Consider the abstinence-only AIDS prevention policy embraced by many conservative governments. At a recent meeting before the UNGASS (UN General Assembly Special Session) on AIDS, delegates from these countries expressed disapproval of tactics of prevention that focus on sexual education and condom use.

The young people I work with would strongly reject this approach. We share a common belief that the disagreement between the religious establishment and liberal nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) may well be contributing to the spread of HIV infection.

Safe sex and abstinence are, in fact, the two ends of the same continuum of AIDS prevention policy options. We are not dismissing the importance of abstinence, but rather advocating for the right to be informed about every option so that we can have safe alternatives.

The commitment of the global community to combat HIV/AIDS in youth has been timid. From the above resolutions, it is obvious that one of the main problems in overcoming this pandemic is that young people are not involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of AIDS conventions, declarations, and policy.

I often hear reference to the importance of youth involvement in fighting AIDS, yet there are no steps taken to ensure such involvement. I believe that the most crucial step toward achieving results will be to both include and respect the voices of youth in the making of youth AIDS policy.

How many recommendations made by young people are actually incorporated into any document where youth are a key group? And how much 'youth participation' is actually token representation?

It is paradoxical that in attempting to protect young people from early sexual activity, we are handing them a death warrant. The reality of youth in the 21st century is such that we live in a world very much unlike that of the generation who are driving our policies. We need ownership of the decisions that affect our futures. We cannot continue to write off entire generations because of myopic and archaic policy making.

AIDS information for youth is a vital right, and all policy should reflect that, otherwise ours is a losing battle. The reaction of African youth to this impasse is very strong. We are shocked that in this day and age policy makers think we are too young to learn about safe sex, but not too young to die of AIDS.

- This editorial was published on July 19, 2001, by the *Halifax Herald* (Canada). It is sent to us by [Young People's Press](#), a Canadian group that helps young people place stories in the media.

A Question of Image

Adults throughout the world find sex education extremely difficult. According to a recent paper from the UN Development Program (UNDP), this is partly because they view adolescent sexuality as a threat and young people as inherently irresponsible. In fact, suggests the UNDP report, the vast majority of adolescents take their sexuality very seriously. If sex education is to help, it needs to project a more positive image of sexuality.

One of the most important reasons why young people are denied adequate access to information, sexual health services, and protective resources such as condoms derives from the stereotypical and often contradictory ways in which young people are viewed. It is popularly believed that all young people are risk-taking pleasure seekers who live only for the present.

Such views tend to be reinforced by the uncritical use of the term adolescent (with its connotations of 'storm and stress') in the specialist psychological and public health literatures. This term tends not only to homogenize and pathologize our understanding of young people and their needs, it encourages us to view young people as possessing a series of 'deficits' (in knowledge, attitudes, and skills) that need to be remedied by adults and the interventions they make.

(Some researchers) have commented that adults often hold ambivalent attitudes toward young people, viewing them simultaneously as '... small adults and as immature inexperienced and untrustworthy children.'

Many adults also have difficulty acknowledging adolescents as sexual beings, and therefore adolescent sexuality is viewed as something that must be controlled and restrained. These stereotypes have also informed much HIV-related research and practice with young people. For example, one research team has described the central images to be found in the literature on young people and AIDS. These include the 'unknowledgeable or ill-informed adolescent,' the 'high-risk adolescent,' the 'adolescent who is unduly conforming to peer pressures,' and the 'tragic but innocent adolescent' who inadvertently becomes infected by HIV. These powerful images and assumptions influence policy and practice in relation to young people and their sexual health.

Some adults believe that young people are by nature sexually promiscuous and that giving them information about sex will make young people more sexually active. As a result, sex education in schools either does not take place or promotes only certain risk reduction measures (most usually abstinence). Yet there is now clear evidence that well-designed programs of sex education, which include messages about safer sex as well as those about abstinence, may delay the onset of sexual activity, reduce the number of sexual partners, and increase contraceptive use among those who are already sexually active.

While formal health education programs have been influenced by stereotypical attitudes about young people's sexuality, parents and families across a wide variety of cultures have also sought to deny young people information about sex and reproduction. In countries as different as India and Nicaragua, parents and children report that they do not talk to each other about sex. Often parents and family members do this in the belief that they are 'protecting' young people from information they believe may lead to sexual experimentation. However, evidence suggests that young people who openly communicate about sexual matters with their parents, especially mothers, are less likely to be sexually active or (if girls) become pregnant before marriage.

While young people have been commonly stereotyped as uniformly hedonistic and irresponsible, they are in fact a remarkably heterogeneous group. Their experiences vary widely according to cultural background, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status among other variables. While some young people may take risks, the majority of them are at least as responsible as their parents, and some may be even more so.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that in many developing countries, the onset of puberty signals greater economic and family responsibility rather than increased pleasure seeking and risk taking. In many societies, the family and immediate community traditionally provided young people with information and guidance about sex and sexuality. In some societies, including many throughout the continent of Africa, the provision of information about sex used to be formalized as part of initiation into adult roles.

In parts of East and Central Africa, traditional rituals of initiation prepared young people for their adult role, including education on the responsibilities of sex, marriage, and child-rearing. Because sexuality contributed to social cohesion, communities developed 'rules' concerning the expression of sexuality as well as mechanisms for controlling sexual behavior. Sexual behavior's potential to cause harm - through jealousy, emotional discord, and infection - as well as good, was widely recognized. Communities therefore developed codes of conduct relating to when, where, and with whom sexual relationships might take place.

To communicate these principles to young people, initiation ceremonies were held, often separately for girls and for boys. In Tanzania, for example, sex education was contextualized in terms of preparation for adult life. In Kenya, rituals associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood and which included sex education have also been documented.

Until recently, the transition from childhood to adulthood, which did not constitute a period of 'adolescence' as contemporarily understood, was sharper and less protracted. With increasing urbanization, however, these rituals have lost their significance and the transition from childhood to adulthood has been complicated by 'the development of the phase of adolescence ... [as well as] by the decline of traditional sources of authority, such as the extended family.'

Until relatively recently, much work with young people in developing countries has centered on the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS, rather than the promotion of sexual health. Only rarely have programs focused on the positive aspects of human sexuality including sexual pleasure. It is important to shift the emphasis from pregnancy and disease prevention toward multi-dimensional and rights-orientated conceptions of

sexual health. Programs that do not offer relevant and realistic accounts of sexuality are unlikely to be well received by young people.

Unhelpful stereotypes about young people and adolescent sexuality inform the attitudes of parents, other adults, and even those involved with HIV-prevention. Wherever possible, program designers should attempt to challenge these stereotypes, since they serve as an obstacle to the development of appropriate and relevant programs of sex and HIV-related prevention.

- This extract is taken from '[Adolescent Sexuality, Gender, and the HIV Epidemic](#),' by Kim Rivers and Peter Aggleton, from the Institute of Education at the University London. It was written for a special program on HIV and development.

Dead Girl Next Door

Lydia Bosire visits the University of Nairobi and discovers that AIDS preys on students who are alienated and isolated.

No one has studied AIDS at Nairobi University, but students there speculate that the disease is rampant.

One former student, named Clare, made it clear that there is more going on than is reported in the media. In 1997, while she was at the university, a girl died of AIDS in her hall of residence.

'It is a night I will never forget,' she says. The residence hall suddenly reverberated to loud screams when the dead girl's roommate realized what had happened. The girl had been dead for two days before anyone noticed. When she was lifted off the bed, she was peeling, said Clare.

Clare is not a stranger to AIDS. Born in Uganda, she has lived in villages where there are more children than parents. In fact, in her house, they have 'adopted' some of their relatives who lost family to AIDS. People died within six months of being diagnosed, she said.

So how could the girl next door die, without any realizing that she was infected? The answer is that the university atmosphere is very individual. No one checks to see if a student is attending classes. Everyone looks out for themselves. In this case, however, the custodian must have known about this girl's situation. He is the one who is always bribed to let in men into the halls of residence after dark, against the rules.

Clare feels the problem is that the students do not have information. She brought up a very interesting distinction between education and information. Students can 'have the information' but still get infected. It is only when they really accept and understand the information that they are really 'educated.' Until that happens, scenes of horror like this one out of Nairobi University will happen again and again.

It could take a long time for the truth to sink in. Even though these students were shocked to find that they had shared a bathroom with a dead girl with AIDS, they still don't accept that it can happen to them.

This is what AIDS programs are up against - the invincibility of youth.

Special Report: Youth and Sex in Nigeria

Leo Metcalf went to Nigeria this summer for YAA, to discover how young people are living with AIDS in Africa's most populous nation. He was astonished to find that prostitution is rife in the halls of the University of Lagos. He also found that young people in Nigeria are discouraged from buying condoms, even though condoms provide the cheapest and easiest form of protection against the HIV virus.

Mr. Metcalf's findings underline the importance of sex education. But many Nigerian parents find it very difficult to talk frankly about sex with their children, and teachers are no better. As teachers and parents fail in this most basic of duties, the burden is being taken up by inspiring young Nigerians like Adeola Olunloyo, a student at the university, who sees an important role for the YAA network.

Students for Sale

By Leo Metcalf

I visited the University of Lagos (also called UNILAG or the University of Nigeria) to see Adeola Olunloyo, also known as Deola. Deola is a third-year student of mass communication at the university who also works as a volunteer with Action Health Incorporated (AHI). AHI is a youth-focused, nonprofit organization that advocates for youth health and development in Nigeria.

UNILAG caters to 30,000 students. Deola is in the girls' hostel Moremi Hall, which houses around 2,000 girls. UNILAG has five hostels for female students and five for males. Moremi Hall is most notorious for commercial sex work by students.

It is a sad but well-known fact that young girls around campus come out in the evening, and then stand around the roads to get picked up by people invariably described as 'rich fat business men.' These men are nicknamed MFTs (men from town) or 'aristos.' The students are known as 'aristo babes.'

Deola told us about this time she was visiting a friend's room. She overheard two girls talking. They thought Deola and her friend were sleeping and one of them was saying: 'When I go to town with my aristos, I don't allow them to come in me, and in that way there is no danger.' Deola felt helpless because of the awkwardness of the situation. She lay quietly through the rest of the conversation.

The girls were talking about it in a proud way, as if they felt 'smart' about duping these men out of their money. They also discussed the pregnancies they had had to terminate, and how one of them had got her 'aristo' to pay double the price of the abortion.

Girls engage in this commercial sex work for necessity and for fun. Tuition at UNILAG is highly subsidized, but the books, food, and accommodations are all expensive. Many girls also do it for

material reasons. They feel the need to 'try to gain class' by wearing expensive dresses and jewelry. They often have expensive items such as big televisions and VCRs in their rooms.

Some even ask for cars. These are the ones with men who treat them like second wives, as if they were in a polygamous relationship. These girls often become pregnant. At least they are not left to fend for themselves.

There are also pimps on the UNILAG campus. Non-student pimps often talk to the guys who stop in their cars, then go to the dorms to pick the girls up. (They know where the girls are, their room numbers, etc.). Male students who work as pimps do so at a higher level. For example, they will help government officials or very rich businessmen who sometimes ask for up to 20 girls for special events.

Some girls act as pimps in return for a commission. While I was visiting one of Deola's friends in another room, Deola pointed out one of these 'commissioners' to me.

UNILAG has a terrible reputation. When Deola tells people that she goes to UNILAG she can see what they are thinking. If she admits that she is staying in Moremi, then it gets worse: 'You can see them going 'oooooh.' There is this certain smile on their face,' she said. I asked her to write a short note about what it is like to come from Moremi Hall. See article called 'Aristo Babes' reproduced below.

The estimate of the number of girls in Moremi Hall who prostitute themselves could be exaggerated, but some speculate that it could be approaching one-tenth! That said, Deola was quick to add that there are also many very commendable girls at the hall. They confront their financial difficulties by selling toast or soft drinks or get other jobs.

Moses Imai, who founded the Nigeria Youth Rangers and serves as YAA's representative in Nigeria, later reminded me that prostitution is everywhere. Not just in the university and not just in towns, but also small villages.

Most prostitutes do it for their whole life, he explained. 'Once you are in the milieu, your friends will be in the business and will pressure you to stay. In addition, you will be used to the money.'

Moses mentioned a program he knows that pays prostitutes good money to reintegrate them into society. But, he said, the money quickly disappears on clothes, rent, and drugs. It even goes as tax to the 'area boys' who control neighborhoods and are the equivalent of pimps.

Moses spoke of the students at Moremi Hall, who are picked up on campus by fat cats in flashy cars and sell their bodies. These girls lack the will or power to negotiate for safe sex, he says. Deola makes the same point below. In some respects, full-time prostitutes are more empowered than these college girls, because they have seen deaths and terrible things and are hardened by this experience. It gives them the strength to say that the condom is needed.

Shame About Condoms

There are no free condoms in Nigeria. The Society for Family Health (SFH) is responsible for distributing all condoms in Nigeria, under the brand name 'Gold Circle.' It publicizes the condoms mostly with jingles on the radio and subsidizes their sale with funds from the British and American aid agencies (DFID and USAID). A condom can be bought for 10nira (1 U.S. cent) on the street.

But expense is not the main difficulty that faces young people who want to buy a condom. The main problem is shame.

This is especially true for girls. 'If people see condoms in your bag, they will call you a aisha (prostitute),' says Bioda, a friend of Moses Imai. She readily admits that she herself cannot go to a pharmacy to buy condoms. Then how does she get condoms, I ask? Her answer is very simple: 'The guy must have them.'

But Moses Imai explains that even boys cannot buy condoms in their neighborhood since there is always the danger that someone there will know who they are. 'These are not minor, but major problems,' says Moses. His belief is that 'free condom distribution would really help.'

Later in the week I met Alex Udongokwe, one of the top men in the SFH, which controls the distribution of all condoms in Nigeria. I asked him about giving out free condoms to youth groups so that they could distribute them. I suggested that getting condoms from their peers might be a more acceptable way than buying them at a pharmacy, where they might face shame and humiliation.

Alex answered that before SFH could give condoms to a group, it would need information on the distributors, a proposal, and a clear and very solid distribution program. It became clear to me that a youth group like the Nigeria Youth Action Rangers (NYAR) would have great difficulty in meeting these demands. This is quite a pity, considering that NYAR has agents in most neighborhoods of Lagos. If they were allowed to distribute condoms, the use of condoms would increase exponentially.

However, Alex explained to me that the whole procedure was necessary so as to avoid dumping of condoms on the commercial market, and destroying the commercial channels that already exist. Destroying these channels might do more harm than good, he said. It was something I had not thought about.

Alex told me that between January and June 2001, SFH sold 28 million condoms. They hoped to achieve a target of 120 million in a year. That seems a lot, but when you remember that the population in Nigeria is 120 million, such numbers do not seem to be quite so big anymore. In fact, they seem alarmingly small if one considers how many young Nigerians are obviously engaging in sex.

Deola, Student Educator

Nigerians don't really talk about sex, especially not parents with their children. But according to Moses Imai, young people are clearly involved in sexual relations. 'Most young people have sex, this is a fact. Yet talking about sex is still taboo. The only place where young people do talk about sex is at school, where myths quickly propagated.'

There is certainly not much work being done to spread information on HIV/AIDS on the UNILAG campus at the moment. The Student Union Body has handed the task to Adeola Olunloyo.

Deola hopes to start something soon on campus with Moses Imai from the NYAR. 'The first step will be a rally, as well as an enlightenment program to be held in the main auditorium, with exhibition stands on difference aspects of the disease,' she says.

I suggested they might also wander around the campus in the evening, spreading pamphlets and condoms to the girls. Deola thought that the girls live together in such proximity that this might create tension and conflict unless an outside group organized it.

Deola started to campaign against AIDS in school, where she became involved in a project run by AHI. AHI was set up by a journalist and her husband, who is a doctor. Deola is now her third year of studying Mass Communications at the University of Lagos. AHI permits her to develop her skills as a presenter on the television program she hosts every Saturday.

AHI also lets Deola write for a newsletter called 'Growing Up,' which is being distributed to around 5,000 individuals, NGOs, and schools. At first it was free, but now you must send a stamp to have it sent to you. The newsletter is funded by the MacArthur Foundation, which also funds AHI's Information, Education, and Communication program.

AHI has also been pushing for the inclusion of sexual education in secondary schools for some time. The government has recently approved the inclusion, although in Deola's words 'there is still a great gap between approval and application.' AHI has written a curriculum that they hope to implement as soon as possible.

Deola's views on the government involvement in the fight against AIDS are generally positive. The problem, she says, is Nigeria's size: 'There are too many people, tribes, and regions. Coordination will be the biggest problem.'

That will not be the only problem. Deola explains that Nigerians are beginning to feel fatalistic toward AIDS because so much has been said about the disease: 'They feel they have heard enough about it. There is an Uruba saying: 'You must die of something.' Their attitude is that if it is to be AIDS, then so be it.'

The obstacles to sex education are not helped by the fact that most seropositive Nigerians are still hiding their status. 'There is a need for more Mohammed Farouks, Kabatis, and Yinkas,' she says. This was a reference to three brave young people I met in Nigeria who make no secret

about being HIV-positive as they work to fight AIDS. (Kabati is a young HIV-positive woman who developed AIDS through rape. She is profiled in Issue 8 of this series. Yinka is profiled in Issue 12.)

This brought us on to the subject of discrimination. Why is it so hard for people to come out? Deola explains that 'people are still very ignorant about the disease and will discriminate with little shame.'

She recalled having shown an article she wrote about Kabati to one of her friends at university. It includes a photo in which Deola can be seen hugging Kabati. Her friend said: 'What is this? You are so close to her.'

When Deola explained to her in detail how HIV is transmitted, the girl grudgingly accepted what she said but in an embarrassed manner. 'Yeah,' she said. 'I know that but you still shouldn't have held her that close.'

Deola believes strongly in the activities of YAA as a way of fighting the battle against AIDS: 'Young people should form national, regional, and international networks to monitor and advocate for implementation of the declaration of commitments on HIV/AIDS. We need support from donors to make it easier for us to coordinate ourselves in such a way that our voices will be heard, and efforts will be made to meet our real needs (especially those of us in Africa).'

Aristo Babes

By Adeola Olunloyo

I met a guy outside campus and we were having an intelligent conversation, until he asked where I was schooling. I told him University of Lagos and the moment I mentioned my hall of residence, his countenance changed, his eyes lit up and he suddenly started behaving like he just hit a jackpot.

By the end of that encounter, I knew I couldn't see him again because the reputation of my hall had preceded me again, the popular image of any girl staying in my hostel.... The Great Moremi Hall.

This female hall is the most popular in University of Lagos. The girls are beautiful, intelligent, and come in various shades, shapes, and sizes, but what makes them really popular all over the country is the commercial sex work in which they engage.

These 'popular few' also called Aristo Girls do not usually mingle with guys who are students. Every night MFTs (men from town) park their flashy cars and go in for a girl of their choice, whom could be a regular or a 'new catch.'

Some of these girls engage in the trade to survive and fend for themselves, while others just do it for fun or as a means of acquiring luxury for themselves. There are pimps who are young school drop-outs (who do menial jobs during the day) at the car park to facilitate the process of client-

customer service. If the man doesn't want to go in, the pimp can get the girl from the hall for a fee, or better still if the MFT is a first timer, the pimps can recommend girls for him.

This business is present in other female halls of residence, but the girls at Moremi are known to be in a class of their own. A lot of students on campus still lack access to factual information and engage in risky behavior that can expose them to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

A group of students in conjunction with the Students Union Body are working together to launch an HIV Awareness Campaign. The main aim is to provide factual information on HIV/AIDS and related issues to students on campus and empower them (especially girls) to protect themselves against the virus.

The present practice of commercial sex workers on campus is especially worrisome as most of the girls lack the skills to negotiate condom use with their clients. Their young age, as well as their lack of experience, thus puts them at a much higher risk than the career prostitutes whom populate the Lagos streets at night.

The campaign is going to involve stakeholders within and outside Unilag (University of Lagos) campus, all working toward achieving the same goal - to prevent HIV from thriving among students.

Moses Imai, the YAA Representative

In the two years since he co-founded the Nigerian Youth Action Rangers (NYAR), Moses Imai has emerged a powerful, articulate voice for youth inclusion and participation in the HIV/AIDS policy and implementation process in Nigeria.

NYAR believes in using peer-to-peer education and a community-based approach. It also tries to establish networks among youths. As Moses puts it: 'In our organization, we believe that HIV/AIDS is a global problem, but there is still information lag. So we use seminars, one-on-one education, and drama strategy, and we also carry out baseline studies before working in any community, which usually gives us acceptance in the communities.'

Two Who Work With Students

Dr. Alex Muganzi Muganga, 25, is a medical student at Mulago Hospital, Uganda, who has been trying to stop the spread of AIDS among fellow students for much of the last ten years. He himself only completed his degree in medicine from Makerere University last June.

In 1998 Muganzi was elected 'health minister' for University Hall, his hall of residence, where he ran a simple campaign known as ABC. 'The letter A stood for abstain, B, be faithful, and C use a condom. It was very effective,' he says. Muganzi and other student leaders used to distribute free condoms. Whenever possible, they also sponsored an AIDS Awareness Week in the days leading up to World AIDS Day.

Twenty-four year-old James Maswache feels that parents have abdicated their roles to teachers and are not giving young people the right message about sex. Maswache has devised an alternative form of education that targets high school students by letting them devise the syllabus and run the program.

Maswache is a physics graduate of the University of Nairobi who writes poems to relieve stress. He turned into an AIDS activist in 1998 after reading a book on tropical disease in Africa.

At university, he joined a student group called the University Students AIDS Control Association (USACA), a student-run organization based at the University of Nairobi. He and some other members of USACA then decided to create a new group known as YB2K to target high-school students.

Instead of making the mistake of bombarding young people with information, YB2K plans to let students come up with their own ideas and resolutions. Their idea is to create student clubs in a number of schools on an experimental basis. Each club will elect two delegates, who will attend a seminar where they will brainstorm about ways to develop club activities in the form of poems and plays.

The word 'condom' is nowhere mentioned, because there is such controversy between the government and churches over whether to distribute condoms and because every student has his or her own opinion. It is not YB2K's role to change minds, but rather to gradually change behavior.

YB2K is working hard to attract students to the clubs. It has designed a website that allows members to communicate and also helps new clubs to register online. (The site is looking for a host.) YB2K is also trying to attract young people by using well-known local musicians, and they have managed to involve one popular group known as Kalamashaka. Another idea is to ask local radio personalities - who are adored by the youth - to give advice about sexuality during the programs they host.