

## THE RAPID FUNDING ENVELOPE FOR HIV/AIDS: TANZANIA



### HIV Doesn't Take a Holiday

"HIV doesn't take a holiday!" The young man yells into the microphone and the crowd roars. He is dressed in the hip, urban gear emulated around the world: baggy jeans, a thick gold chain, and an over-sized t-shirt. The crowd of over 1,000 University of Dar es Salaam students stirs him on, partly reacting to him—a well-known Tanzanian rap star—and partly reacting to the message that has hit home: HIV doesn't take a holiday. It is the last day of classes: the end of final exams is, like everywhere, a cause for celebration.



*A popular rap singer entertains the audience with his music, while telling the tale of the impact of HIV/AIDS.*

The students are free for three months, to travel home, visit old friends, sleep late, and party. They have begun tonight, gathered in front of the youth hostel, drawn by the stage, the thumping music, and the trendy DJ's belting out the slang of youth. Be it rap or hip-hop, the students listen to their favorite performers sing and dance and—throughout each performance—hammer home the dangers of HIV/AIDS. One rap is the story of a young man who died of AIDS, a university student like them, one with many friends and one that also went to church regularly. The students likely know someone with a similar tale—a fellow student, a friend, or a family member. Statistically, they have all been affected by HIV/AIDS. For them, however, accessing information at school about the number one killer among 25–44 year olds in Tanzania has been difficult.

Organized by the Students Partnerships Worldwide (SPW), this "edu-tainment" festival is one of many initiatives aimed at getting young people's attention and teach them about HIV/AIDS and reproductive health issues. Founded in 1992, SPW/Tanzania is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) coordinating young adult-led initiatives under the umbrella of the British SPW international educational charity. In Tanzania, SPW recruits

peer volunteers to work in rural communities and schools after graduation and before beginning university. After an intensive training program, the young people serve as peer educators and role models aiming to increase awareness of reproductive health and HIV/AIDS through life skills education. Every year, almost 200 volunteers serve under-privileged Tanzanian communities and, in turn, form a network of young people that are among the brightest the country has to offer.

Once at university, however, these same volunteers move into a very different environment. Most Tanzanian universities do not have standard HIV/AIDS education incorporated into classes and student activities. Despite being at their sexually active peak, accessing condoms and counseling can prove challenging. Young university students living away from home for the first time feel new independence and experiment sexually; SPW recognized that the lack of HIV/AIDS and reproductive health education at university was contributing to Tanzania's burgeoning AIDS epidemic. SPW therefore devised an innovative project that would build on its existing network of volunteers and apply their knowledge to universities. To implement this program, however, SPW needed resources.

In 2000, the Tanzanian Commission for HIV/AIDS (TACAIDS) recognized the need for a short-term funding mechanism that could provide 6–12 month grants to civil society organizations like SPW for innovative, urgent HIV/AIDS activities. With support from eight bilateral donors<sup>1</sup>, TACAIDS established the Rapid Funding Envelope for HIV/AIDS (RFE), managed jointly by Management Sciences for Health (through its Management and Leadership Program) and Deloitte & Touche. In 2004, SPW

<sup>1</sup> Canadian International Development Agency, Embassy of Finland, Irish Aid, Royal Danish Embassy, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, USAID

applied successfully for an RFE grant to implement multimedia behavior change communications at Tanzania's three largest universities using peer group networks.

First, SPW conducted a baseline survey to identify students' HIV/AIDS and reproductive health knowledge. This survey confirmed significant information gaps: 40% of students reported never having been taught about HIV at school; 80% had never used counseling; and close to half had never discussed reproductive health issues with their parents. Further, students reported being very sexually active while few used condoms consistently and most did not ask about their partner's sexual history. Most disturbing, however, was that few students reported considering themselves at risk for contracting HIV. As one SPW volunteer at the University of Dar es Salaam said: "From my own experience, young people's behavior at university is risky...they (often) have two or more partners. They can be careless...and taking responsibility in personal behavior often wanes when (young people) are on their own."

Working in partnership with local NGOs at the three universities, SPW recruited 70 former volunteers to become part of the university-based network of educators and counselors. These volunteers helped to conduct three major "edu-tainment" festivals, seminars, and weekly radio programs aired nationwide that provided a platform to discuss HIV/AIDS and other reproductive health issues between students and experts. At the University of Dar es Salaam, the volunteers helped to establish an information resource center, creating a friendly location for young adults to access condoms, HIV/AIDS information, and confidential counseling.

In less than a year, the SPW program has distributed more than 25,000 condoms and reached more than 9000 students with HIV/AIDS information and counseling. They worked with GTZ and Femina, a local HIV/AIDS initiative, to launch and expand the Cheza Salama Web site ([www.chezasalama.com](http://www.chezasalama.com)), which offers online advice, HIV/AIDS information, and answers reproductive health questions for young adults, using English, Swahili, and slang they can relate to.



*By blending HIV education with entertainment, SPW festivals*

## PROJECT OUTCOMES

- ▶ Created a student network at three major universities to share HIV/AIDS information and offer counseling to peers
- ▶ Reached hundreds of listeners through 35 weekly radio programs covering HIV/AIDS and other reproductive health issues
- ▶ Improved condom availability and distributed more than 25,000 condoms at universities through resource centers and student volunteers
- ▶ Established an information resource center, providing free condoms, HIV/AIDS information, and counseling services to University of Dar es Salaam students
- ▶ Launched and expanded the interactive reproductive health website, Cheza Salama, in both English and Swahili

The student volunteers are not only working hard to earn a degree, but they are influencing their country's future by showing thousands more like them how to avoid HIV/AIDS. Godfrey, 22, a volunteer studying architecture, said: "Through the SPW program, we have much more influence on the students; they come to me with questions and concerns about HIV/AIDS. With the launch of the information resource center and the (Cheza Salama) Web site, it is easier for students to access both condoms and information. This (program) has also given me something—a feeling of being concerned about other people. When I give advice I help them, and this makes me happy." Such students are more likely to continue to help fellow Tanzanians in the future as a result. "The spirit of volunteerism and of helping others is infectious," said Stephen, another student volunteer.

Back at the SPW festival, the final performers leave the stage. As the students prepare to go home for the winter break, they reflect on the year, on what they have learned, and hopefully, on all they have to look forward to. If they remember tonight's messages—have fun but be safe, use condoms, and speak out about HIV—these students will have avoided HIV on their winter breaks and will return to this same campus for another academic year, always remembering that, unlike them, HIV doesn't take a holiday.

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