

African leaders speak out about HIV/AIDS, culture

JOHANNESBURG: The Soul City Institute's regional campaign in partnership with the Champions for an HIV-free Generation have produced a series of one minute 'conversations' with three African leaders: Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dr Speciosa Wandira and Dr Kenneth Kaunda. The conversations are currently being broadcast across nine Southern African countries.

According to Harriet Perlman of the Soul City Institute for Health & Development Communication, "Through story and personal anecdotes these PSAs will move and inspire audiences. Strong leadership and positive role models, are essential to the success of HIV prevention and these moving 'story moments' with great figures and leaders from our continent, will touch viewers. These public service announcements (PSAs) raise issues of culture, women and loss - in the context of the widespread practice of multiple concurrent partners (MCP), having more than one sexual partner in the same time. These PSAs are part of the OneLove campaign, the largest cross-border social change communication campaign to tackle the issue of MCP."

The PSAs are receiving unprecedented broadcast coverage in Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Negotiations are underway with broadcasters in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. DFID South Africa's regional BCC programme has funded the production of the PSAs and costs associated with the broadcasting of the PSAs were funded by SADC and PEPFAR. The broadcasters in the nine countries also gave substantial discounts to ensure that the PSAs reach a wider audience both on national radio and TV stations.

Public service announcements

Archbishop Desmond Tutu is a South African activist, a Nobel Peace laureate and Christian cleric who rose to worldwide fame during the 1980s as an opponent of apartheid. He was the first black South African Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, and primate of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (now the Anglican Church of Southern Africa). Archbishop Tutu has been active in the defence of human rights and uses his high profile to campaign for the oppressed.

In this PSA, Archbishop Desmond Tutu speaks of his personal life and his 55-year marriage to Leah. He reflects on the need for couples to talk about equality in relationships in a world where culture often views males as superior.

Dr Speciosa Wandira, the first female vice president of an African country, has dedicated her life to the advancement of women, reducing poverty and promoting social justice. She served as executive VP of Uganda from 1994 to 2003. During this time she publicly took on the subject of domestic violence against women in Uganda when she filed for divorce from her abusive husband. She has sparked debate over legislation to outlaw marital rape, ease divorce for women, grant property rights to wives and regulate polygamy.

In this PSA Dr Speciosa Wandira speaks of how she walked away from her marriage, how she raised her three children alone and has tried to instil in them positive values for good relationships.

Dr Kenneth David as the first president of an independent Zambia, helped avert a civil war in the late 1960s. In 1987, he was the first African leader to publicly announce that his son had died of AIDS.

In this moving conversation, Dr Kenneth Kaunda talks of the son he lost to HIV & Aids and reflects on what this has meant to him and his family, and tells us his views on life and love.

OneLove campaign

There is increasing research that links the severity of the HIV epidemic in this region to the sexual practice of having multiple concurrent partners (MCPs). SADC called on member states to urgently address this issue and the OneLove campaign is a response to this call.

OneLove has been rolled out across the region with print materials, television and radio drama, on the ground community dialogues and now these PSAs. Led by Soul City and its regional partners, the campaign is built on groundbreaking research, across 10 countries, which examined the sexual attitudes, and practices, social norms and values that drive and underpin this risky sexual practice.

Soul City, is a social and behaviour change communication organisation based in South Africa but operates regionally with local country partners in eight SADC countries. Soul City has pioneered an approach that uses the power of story to promote social and behaviour change.

Television and radio drama series combine entertainment and education, and have reached millions of people in both South and Southern Africa with important life saving health messages. Evaluations over 17 years show measurable impact.

Champions for an HIV-free Generation

Champions for an HIV-free Generation, is a group of former African presidents and other influential personalities launched in August 2008, during the 17th International AIDS Conference in Mexico City, with an aim to mobilise high-level leadership in renewed and revitalised responses to HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. The Champions believe that stronger, more visionary and outspoken leadership must come from the continent most affected by this epidemic.

They are well respected and impactful in their own rights. As individuals they bring unique strengths based on their experiences and backgrounds. Together, as a group, they represent a moral authority to guide and support regional leaders in the response to HIV and AIDS.

To date the Champions have visited five sub-Saharan countries and held in depth meetings with heads of state, parliamentarians and civil society groups with the aim of sharing experiences and best practices regarding HIV prevention efforts in the region. They also encourage, in country leadership to take an active role in the sustainability of the national response, and ensure HIV prevention mechanisms are available to all towards an HIV-free generation.

With this campaign the Champions hope to advance their mandate of HIV/AIDS prevention, by advocating for behavioural change across the region and renewed efforts to combat the disease.

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