

# ICTs to fight against HIV/AIDS

## Straight Talk

[www.straighttalk.or.ke](http://www.straighttalk.or.ke)

Straight Talk is a unique platform for youth in Kenya with a nation-wide outreach and successful in providing Kenyan adolescents with a forum for open dialogue on sexuality and reproductive rights related to HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, girls' rights and more. Straight Talk started as one of the projects from the Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors (KAPC) in 1995 with the objective to equip young people with information and life skills so that they can protect themselves from high risk situations and remain in control of their own behaviour. The project intends to contribute to combating the spread of HIV/AIDS, reduce teenage pregnancies, promote safe and responsible sexual behaviours, discourage harmful traditional practices, eliminate sexual abuse and promote gender and human rights awareness around these topics. Young people are reached through old and new media: the Straight Talk newspaper, Straight Talk clubs, the Straight Talk radio programme and the Straight Talk interactive website.

One of the unique features of Straight Talk is that young people control and direct the project. Through a participatory and interactive approach, young people identify



sexual and reproductive health challenges that they face and pinpoint the information that they need. Adolescence is a critical developmental period and Straight Talk experience shows that the majority of adolescents struggle to acquire accurate

information and the necessary life skills. Access to reproductive health information is a basic human right, yet many adolescents are denied access to appropriate facts.

## MANASO

The Malawi Network of AIDS Service Organisations (MANASO) is a national coordinating body for AIDS service organisations formed in 1996. Its prime objective is to contribute to the reduction of HIV and AIDS prevalence through coordination, training, mobilisation and allocation of resources to community based organisations in Malawi. There is an urgent



need in most developing countries to fill in the information gap and to integrate the efforts by different players in the area of HIV/AIDS. The lack of adequate and up to date information is fuelling the spread of HIV/AIDS in Malawi. Organisations like MANASO play an important role in dissemination of information. MANASO aims to facilitate the sharing of information, ideas, experiences and resources in HIV/AIDS related work among community based organisations, and to build the capacities of these organisations to improve their service delivery.

MANASO's activities are predicated on the fact that although there is a multiplicity of community based organisations working in the area of HIV/AIDS, they lack the adequate, correct and up to date information, capacity and resources to effectively implement their activities. The

mushrooming of community based organisations also presents a need to integrate initiatives through networking to avoid duplication of efforts. MANASO focuses on the establishment of regional information resource centres, equipped with electronic databases to enhance information dissemination. Furthermore, MANASO undertakes training activities for staff of different organisations on strategic use of ICTs, and makes an effort to provide documentation, share lessons learned and best practices by AIDS service organisations.

## Agua Buena

<http://www.aguabuena.org>

The Agua Buena Human Rights Association was created in 1997, in response to the crisis surrounding the AIDS epidemic in Central America. Agua Buena initially supported people who live with HIV/AIDS in Costa Rica in their struggle in early 1997, to obtain AIDS medications. At the end of 1997, the Costa Rican Constitution Court ordered the government to provide anti-retroviral (ARV) therapy to all people with HIV/AIDS in Costa Rica. Within 3 years, more than 900 people received ARV therapy. Since then, Agua Buena has broadened its working area to the Central American region where they support and cooperate with various organisations, provide trainings and organise regional meetings. Agua Buena acts as a reference point to the struggle for access to treatment and publishes an electronic bulletin and background articles on the website: [www.aguabuena.org](http://www.aguabuena.org)

At the same time, the organisation takes action against the high prices of the medication for people living with HIV/AIDS, controlled by the billion dollar pharmaceutical industry, and helps to

investigate the possibility of the production of generic medications which would lower the costs of the ARV treatment considerably. Agua Buena also draws attention to those who have the power and resources to make changes and to encourage and, where necessary, pressure them to do so.

Agua Buena aims to constitute strong advocacy groups for and by people, living with HIV/AIDS throughout the Central American region. It is unthinkable that they could do this work without the use of ICTs, as an important component of their work consists of creating, gathering and making available relevant information for the Central American region.

### STAR programme

STAR is a capacity building programme in Eastern and Southern Africa. It is facilitated by Hivos in collaboration with Dutch telecom provider KPN, and aims to increase the ability of civil society organisations to strategically use ICTs to reach their goals. More specifically this implies increase of knowledge on strategic use of ICTs, increase of knowledge on ICT applications for day to day work, increase of knowledge sharing amongst stakeholders, improvement of accessibility of services for target groups and improvement of communication between the organisation and their target group.

Participants of the STAR programme are mainly Hivos partners working in the field of HIV/AIDS and micro-finance. Through the STAR programme, organisations will be more aware of the possibilities ICTs can offer and how to deploy them in a strategic way, which, at the end, will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation.

In April 2005, the STAR programme started with a pilot project with two Hivos partner organisations, Straight Talk (Kenya) and Ombetja (Namibia) [more details about these are written in the article by Marius in this issue]. Both work in the field of HIV/AIDS with a special focus on youth. The pilot consists of the implementation of an SMS-tool through which awareness on HIV/AIDS issues amongst adolescents is increased. Through the SMS-tool, the organisations can reach their target group to announce radio shows on HIV/AIDS, or the release of a new magazine and give information on the nearest HIV testing

### 2005 NetAid Global Action Award

The NetAid Global Action Awards established in 2004 to honor American high school students have taken outstanding actions to fight global poverty. Honorees mostly have organized and led projects that have tackled issues such as hunger, HIV/AIDS or access to education in developing countries, and have also raised awareness about these issues in their local communities. This year's honorees are given \$5,000 for their higher education or a cause of their choice.

Amongst the five young honorees, high school senior Katie Reed (age 17) of Beaverton, Oregon was presented with her award by Thomas Lwebuga, the man whose own life story of growing up poor in rural Uganda inspired her to raise funds to provide Ugandan AIDS orphans, most of them girls, with the chance to go to school. Katie's Sponsor-a-Student project will allow more than 150 children orphaned by AIDS to continue their education, and raised resources to build Matala's first library.

Katherine Holland of Amani Children's Foundation honored Rob Stephens (age 18) of Winston-Salem, North Carolina for his work to support a home for AIDS orphans in Kenya, and create an educational dialogue on HIV/AIDS between American and Kenyan students. Rob Stephens organized events from charity basketball games to jewelry-making workshops to support homes for AIDS orphans in Kenya. He also led 20 students and teachers from his state on a study trip to Kenya, where they learned about the HIV/AIDS pandemic firsthand and visited the orphans.

Full biographies of the 2005 NetAid Global Action Awards honorees are available at [www.netaid.org](http://www.netaid.org).

centre. The SMS-pilot has already improved the interactivity among the organisations and their constituents.

### Alliance 2015

[www.alliance2015.org](http://www.alliance2015.org)



Over 40 million people worldwide live with HIV/AIDS. Within the past year, about 5 million people became infected and more than 3 million died. 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of people living with HIV/AIDS, live in sub-Saharan Africa, and the disease is spreading quickly in other developing countries. AIDS is a development crisis. HIV/AIDS is an important focus area of Alliance 2015, a European network of likeminded NGOs.

In 2000, Hivos, together with CESVI (Italy), Concern (Ireland), Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (Germany), Ibis (Denmark) and People in Need (Czech Republic), founded "Alliance2015", a partnership through which poverty can be fought more effectively by cooperating on various levels, working together in developing countries as well as on campaigns

to influence public and political opinion in Europe. A shared interest and vision is what motivates Alliance2015 members.

Alliance2015 has endorsed MDG 6 and aims to achieve a HIV-free-generation by 2015. Alliance2015 emphasises international advocacy which reflects the priorities and challenges of the communities in the South as well as integrate the diverse capacities of the Alliance partners to develop a multi-dimensional programme. The diverse expertise of the partners of Alliance2015 allows it to cover a wide range of activities. Through their diverse target groups, the partners are able to reach out to a large part of the population. Hivos gives special attention to marginalised people (e.g. sexual minorities and sex workers), Ibis to children; Concern to the poorest urban and rural women, men and children; Welthungerhilfe to teens and young adults, and CESVI to pregnant women and babies. The Alliance partners support over 150 AIDS programmes worldwide with a total amount of 15 million euros. The programmes include prevention, promoting the rights of people with HIV/AIDS, improving access to medicine, providing care, mitigating the impact of Aids and strengthening local organisations. ■

*Text: Hivos*