

Young People at the 2008 High Level Meeting on AIDS Demand that their Governments Keep their Promises

Governments are falling behind on their commitments on young people. The Secretary General's reports that in 2007, national surveys found that 40 per cent of young males (ages 15-24) and 36 per cent of young females had accurate knowledge regarding HIV — still well below the 95 per cent goal for young people's HIV knowledge unanimously endorsed by Member States in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. In Uganda, increased funding for "abstinence-only" education has coincided with a decline in knowledge about HIV among young people. The following steps must be urgently taken to move towards Universal Access by 2010:

1. Ensure access to comprehensive sexuality education

The provision of evidence based HIV prevention and comprehensive sexuality education is the most effective and sustainable mode of prevention. The best available evidence shows that "abstinence only" programs fail and actually cause more harm. Young people must have the information, knowledge, skills and commodities they need to protect themselves from infection and lead healthy lives.

2. Address HIV in the context of other sexual and reproductive health needs

HIV does not occur in isolation. With HIV, young people often experience sexual assault, gender-based violence, maternal mortality, unsafe abortions and discrimination based on sexual orientation. Therefore HIV must be seen and addressed in the context of young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

3. Take positive steps to promote and protect young people's rights

The violation of young people's rights puts them at greater risk of harm. The key to reducing vulnerabilities lies in the promotion and protection of these rights. Young people have all human rights irrespective of their age, gender, race or other status. These rights include the full range of their sexual and reproductive rights, the right to be free from violence and persecution and the right to confidentiality. They do not lose their rights merely because of their HIV status.

4. Make health services more accessible to young people

Stigma, discrimination and a lack of awareness make health services inaccessible to young people. Awareness must be raised about such services and their use must be promoted by messages in local languages and popular means of communication. Spaces for young people must be established at existing service centers. Respect for confidentiality and privacy must be ensured at these spaces.

5. Disaggregate data by age

Clear data is needed on how HIV affects young people. In all national censuses and health surveys, data must be disaggregated by age, gender and sub-population at the minimum. Such data will better inform policies and programs to make them more effective.

6. Invest in youth leadership

Policies and programs will be most effective if they involve young people meaningfully in all stages of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Governments must foster mentorship by initiating youth-adult partnerships, build capacities and create sustained spaces for youth participation. Youth representatives must be chosen democratically by youth-led and youth-oriented organizations and networks.

This document was prepared by 36 young people from more than 20 countries attending the High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS on 8 June 2008. For more information, contact youthatHLM@gmail.com.