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Bridging gender gap key to ending HIV/Aids

Gender inequalities hinder empowerment of women and girls. These inequalities frustrate efforts to end HIV, according to UNAIDS. On this Zero Discrimination Day, UNAIDS is highlighting urgent need to end inequalities. Women and girls face inequalities through violation of human rights and discriminatory laws, unequal participation in political life and gender-based violence. Gender pay gap, unequal access to education and barriers to health-care are the other factors obstructing solutions in HIV prevention and treatment. UNAIDS notes that tackling inequalities among women and girls is key to ending HIV.

QUICK FACTS



18.8M

In 2018 an estimated 18.8 million women aged 15 years and above had HIV globally

6,000

young women aged 15-24 become infected with HIV every week

50%

Intimate partner violence increases women risk of exposure to HIV by 50 per cent in areas with high HIV prevalence

20%

Women earn on average 20 per cent less than men



1 Billion

More than 1 billion women lack legal protection against domestic violence

Changing learning via visual arts

Project Hand Up, a non-profit dedicated to health education, banks on the arts to teach communities about issues including Covid-19

■ by Kwach Wakhisi
[@PeopleDailyKE](#)

Many people, including children, perceive the world through senses, and the arts allow us to understand, explore, experiment, and express ourselves and bring out creativity and develop our personality.

It is out of this realisation that Project Hand Up, a non-profit organisation dedicated to producing and performing the new curriculum based on the needs of local foundations and organisations within Kenya initiated a programme to spearhead use of visual and performing arts in the learning process.

"We produce and perform live in-person school programmes about health and safety. We mostly use puppets, visual demonstrations, and stories to teach communities and also make video public service announcements," says Darren Collins, international director, Project Hand Up.

"By using stories and humour, we take tough subjects and make them enjoyable and take 'boring' facts and make them interesting. Our greatest achievement is sheer length of time we can hold the attention of the audience," he adds.

They visit schools, churches and community gathering spaces where various activities are implemented. Edutainment shows lasting between 60-75 minutes are usually performed.

Protus Lumiti, chief manager, Children of God Relief Institute -Nyumbani and a beneficiary of the project says the use of puppets, visual demonstrations and stories to teach has been very effective in communicating; posing no barrier to the learning process.

"A puppet show is very effective. It captures a lot of attention and also retention. What the learners have seen is really in their minds hence visual shows are very effective," says Lumiti.

He adds: "I would have gone there and put up a flip chart and they would have ended up sleeping or dozing off through the session. Therefore, use of such strategies is very effective."

Since the launch of their first programme with Rotary Club of Nairobi in 2015 with a specific focus on HIV/Aids education, more than 100,000 children have benefited from the initiative. The programmes are aimed at eight to 10 year olds; this way, younger children also tend to understand.

"It's just sophisticated and humorous enough that adults and teenagers enjoy our programmes as much or more. We called it four-94. We managed to go to over 100 schools in our first year and we now do public performances in shopping centres after starting Puppets254. Back in July, we were on local and digital TV, reaching several million children per day," Collins explains.

For HIV/Aids education, they consulted with children born with HIV and asked them, "What do you wish your peers knew and understood about you?" In their current campaign about people living with disability and Covid-19, they interviewed them, asking "How do you want to be represent-



Children captivated by a Project Hand Up presentation. COURTESY



Darren Collins, international director, Project Hand Up, on stage with a puppet. COURTESY

COLLINS

It gives health education a friendly and fun face and puts people who may be stigmatised into a position of power

ed? What's important to you? What should other people understand about you? What does your community want to know?

"Then we make it fun, musical, memorable and engaging — that's how it helps. It gives health education a friendly and fun face and puts people who may be stigmatised into a position of power and voice in our programmes," Collins adds.

Besides the use of visual and performing arts, videos are also used to educate and entertain children in the community.

"Since the onset of Covid-19, all our work in schools and community events were cancelled. We quickly pivoted to video, and now instead of reaching thousands of people monthly, we reach millions daily with our health education," he says.

The most exciting part is that this initiative also reaches children in rural areas.

"We love going to places where electricity and access to media is the lowest. Here, audiences are more appreciative. And again, it really isn't just the children. Adults also watch our live shows and love it. It's the grandparents who ask us to 'do it again' as soon as we are finished. When you try to tell an adult, 'Here is what I think you should

know (or do!),' they would think 'Why should I listen to you?' 'Who are you?' 'What is your motive?' 'Should I trust you?'" Collins says.

However, things are different when you target the information towards children. First, children are used to learning, so they are in learning mode. Secondly, adults who see the programme get to hear all the information.

"They then get in parent or teacher mode, encouraging children to listen and learn. No barriers. No questions. No blocks. And they get to enjoy the shows because of the comedy and high production value," explains Collins. With unique learning process, grandparent gets to experience something new for the first time.

He adds that, as long as they remain in the health and safety space, they hope to do more live performances and more videos.

"Hopefully, we can start a weekly TV show because there is no shortage of health and safety topics we can make fun and engaging for children. Although ethics and social responsibility would be a great way to expand our personal and community health topics, if the opportunity ever arises — we would love that too," he says.