

## HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

## Protected sex urged to curb Aids

African men are catching on to the importance of condom use to contain the spread of Aids, but youth and women must be urgently educated, speakers at a recent international meeting on Aids in Africa said.

Seventy per cent of unmarried youth in Kenya, aged between 15 and 19 years engage in sex, most without using condoms said Peter Aggleton, head of social and behavioral research at the World Health Organisation global programme on Aids.

Such unprotected sex among African youth underscores the need to teach use of condoms and other measures to combat the disease that is ravaging the continent, he said.

Of the 15 million people known to be infected with the HIV virus that causes

aids, some 10 million are in Africa according to WHO figures.

Sex with infected people is the main means of transmission on the African continent.

Misconceptions about Aids still flourish. Poverty, illiteracy wars and isolation work against spreading information and material to combat the disease.

A survey in Ghana this year found that 90 per cent of more than 1,000 people knew of Aids and two-thirds knew it is sexually transmitted.

But "20 per cent belief that HIV can be transmitted by casual contact and by mosquitos," said a report presented by P. Antwi, programme manager for Ghana's Aids control programme.

"Interpersonal communication about

Aids within families are with less than conversations about Aids with their sexual partners and less than three per cent with their children," Antwi said.

"Overall, women are significantly less exposed to Aids information, are less knowledgeable about Aids, less like to talk with others about Aids and less likely to believe that people in the community are using condoms," Antwi said.

"Special efforts are needed to reach women."

While 87 per cent of prostitutes surveyed in the Ivory Coast said their customers used condoms, 86 per cent were HIV-Positive, according to a study of 600 subjects by K. Kale of the national public institute of health in Abidjan.

"The prostitutes have limited sources of revenue. Only 38 per cent

have a second source of income and only 59 per cent have finished high school," Kale said. "There is an urgent need to provide support to these women who are sero-positive or sick."

Researchers also discussed the role of Islam in helping stop the spread of Aids.

Health workers in Guinea worked with clerics at three mosques in the capital of Conakry, leading to 23 Aids seminars for women at the mosques this year.

However, another group in Guinea encountered resistance from Muslim 20 per cent of women reporting

imams who objected to Aids information broadcast on national radio and television.

Thierno Diallo of the CNLS Research Centre in Conakry was among those with a success story to report.

His "sensitivity training" sessions with the National Islamic League led to 13 new radio and television sports recorded with the imams' understanding.

"In heavily Islamic counties," said Diallo, "responsibility-enhancing of religious leaders ... contributes to reaching a large segment of the population and breaking the expansion of the disease."

## Condoms disposal hitch causes grave concern

By MARTHA MBUGGUSS

Used condoms are not easy to dispose. They are not easy to flush and plumbers say that condoms are a major cause of blocked toilets. Even more worrying is their danger of contaminating our water supplies and passing all manner of diseases to children who use them as playthings after picking them from dustbins and refuse dumps.

Despite these dangers, Mrs Florence Mhoni, the Director General of Aids Community-based Outreach Services says the condom "is a lifeline" for those who have contracted the Human Immuno Virus (HIV).

However, she points out that effective condom disposal is a worldwide problem. When thrown in dustbins and rubbish dumps, says Mhoni, garbage collectors throw them out, thus placing them within easy reach of children who mistake them for balloons. The minors use them as playthings after blowing air into them.

Mhoni's worry over condom disposal is not a lone concern. As far back as December 19, 1991, Mr Samuel Kobia, the former Secretary General of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) pointed out the dangers of children picking up used condoms and using them as playthings after mistaking them for balloons.

His warning was not heeded and used condoms have continued to find their way into dustbins and rubbish heaps where they can be picked by unsuspecting minors, pollute the environment or find their way into water supplies when washed down valleys into streams and brooks.

## Displayed

Official and scientific hype has made the condom so popular that it has now left the closet to be prominently displayed in public places and facilities including conference halls.

Politicians and scientists tell the public that the condom is the "sure bet of not getting an unwanted pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease including Aids, a scourge that has no known cure.

What they are not saying is how to effectively dispose the condoms after use or the dangers they pose when left lying around in dustbins and garbage dumps. Small wonder then that most

used condoms end up in rubbish the continued global environment deterioration is the unsustainable or are carelessly thrown in rubbish dumps in rural areas only to be picked by innocent minors who mistake them for balloons.

If not picked by minors, they can be swept down valleys into streams and thus contaminate water reservoirs.

Many people, especially in the rural areas, have got no access to clean drinking water and hardly ever boil the supplies they get from the river.

## Indifference

In a world that is increasingly becoming conscious of the importance of having a clean environment, one cannot help but wonder about this indifference over condoms disposal. The condom problem is just the tip of the iceberg as far as waste disposal is concerned.

Many will remember the case of the school near Kenyatta National Hospital whose children used to pick used needles and other drugs which should have been incinerated from the institution's grounds.

There is also the Thika chemical plant furore where the residents claimed that the factory's emissions not only polluted the air but made them sick.

As if that was not enough, the developed world is luring the poor Third World to take paltry sums of cash in exchange for being used as dumping grounds for their dangerous nuclear and industrial. The developing countries also act as guinea pigs for their untried drugs in the form of "aid".

The former executive director of UNEP, Mostafa Tolba, in the preface of the book *World Environment 1972-1992: Two decades of challenge*, has said that while people are the main agents of land degradation and desertification, they are also their own victim.

"Our planet is under siege...the dumping of hazardous wastes and land based sources of pollution present threat," he said.

When discussing the condom, its usefulness and demerits, the changing consumption patterns should be considered.

Michael Keating in *The Earth Summit's Agenda For Change* argues that the major cause of bins in the city and urban areas

pattern of consumption and production, particularly in the industrialised world.

Developing countries, he says, should try to establish sustainable consumption patterns as they build their economies. "They need to guarantee the provision of basic needs for the poor, while avoiding unsustainable patterns which are hazardous to the environment, inefficient and wasteful," he said.

A research by Research International has classified countries into three groups based on their involvement in environmental matters.

There are those described as the lip service environmentalists within which Kenya, India, Brazil, Chile, Nigeria, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Australia, Greece, and Argentina fall.

These are followed by passive environmentalists like South Africa, Colombia and Uruguay.

Next comes the negotiators like Belgium, France, Japan, United Kingdom and New Zealand with anxious experts like the Netherlands, United States, Denmark, Canada, Germany and Norway.

## Classification

This classification notwithstanding, Kenya must address itself to whether she is ready to accept condom without it having a safe way to dispose it.

The way it is disposed at the moment poses dangers to thousands of innocent minors and adults.

The older generation will no doubt recall sitting around a traditional hearth, their firelit-faces concentrating on granddaddy telling the story about the cunning hare and his foolish friend, the hyena.

The hare got the better of his friend who foolishly bashed his dear wife to death while the hare was just banging a drum.

The two had agreed to do a little "disciplining" of their wives, an endeavour which the hyena took far more too seriously.

Is that the kind of deal that the developed world is shoving down the throat of the poor South?

If the nuclear and dangerous chemicals being dumped in the South by the North is anything to go by, then the answer is a positive resounding yes.

Meanwhile, the garbage dump-



ing site for industrial waste at Dandora, Nairobi has become a health hazard to the residents of the surrounding estates adds Adieri Mulaa.

This was announced recently at a seminar that was organised by Action-Aid (K) for the local community health workers. The workshop focused on public health care.

The local administration has urged that the site be transferred elsewhere just like the sewage reservoir was.

Garbage collectors are said to hunt for foodstuff that is dumped as industrial waste. The stuff is later sold to unsuspecting shopkeepers and kiosk owners and residents in open air markets.

The foodstuff that is collected for sale include filleted fish which

is popularly known as *mgongo wazi*, cooking fat, meat, sweets and beverages.

The most affected estates are Dandora, Kariobangi and Korogocho, Ngomongo and Mathare slums.

The seminar participants said these areas had been hit by some mysterious diseases.

They blamed the strange diseases on the consumption of dumped foods. They also said that many infants had died as a result of being fed on food retrieved from the rubbish dump.

In the meantime they urged the authorities to declare the dump out of bounds to the public and post security personnel to keep them off the place.

The chief of Kariobangi Mr Aggrey Jalenga said he was aware of the problem.

The Dandora chief, Mr Peter

Ojiambo, said that there were shabby business deals going on between some of the workers from the firms which dumped their waste there.

He said some unscrupulous workers hid foodstuffs in the waste for sale to the local hawkers.

He said the dump was used by Nairobi Airport Services, Kenchik among many others.

When the dumping started at the site which was part of a sisal farm in 1975, Korogocho did not exist and the closest estate was Kariobangi. The chief said the dump should be transferred to Ruai just like the sewage reservoir.

Mugging is also common in Dandora which has a population of 95,000, said the local chief.