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Fresh assault on Aids  
using music and dance

By CHURCHILL OTIENO

After defying a variety of drugs  
developed by scientists to stop its  
deadly effect on humanity, the

Aide scourge has now to face a  
 recipe concocted by communication specialists to check its spread.

The communicators latest effort is yet another attempt to answer the dodgy question: Why is the Aids/HIV spread so steady, if not increasing, despite a growing awareness of its danger?

In a campaign dubbed *Jisimamie,* folk media and developmentcommunication strategies will beused to bring about behaviouralchanges, a factor which hasdodged health workers despite ahigh percentage of awareness sofar achieved.

The most interesting aspect of this campaign is that it proposes to use popular music to reach people's hearts and make them value safe sex - this is a feat that has eluded the same people's intellectual faculties as any specialist in the field would explain: "A national awareness level of 95.5 per cent has not brought a change in sex. behaviours, “to quote a deputy director of medical services,

Dr Peter Gaturuku.

The top cream in the national fight against the life-wasting condition were two weekends ago joined by Belgian diplomats to launch the new strategy at Kisumu's

Kenyatta Sports Grounds in an eight-hour programme at which popular musicians and entertainers starred while a 10,000- strong audience witnessed.

The new sensation in the local music scene, Princess JuIly stole the show with her hit *Dunia*

*Mbaya.* She mingled and danced with the fans in the choking dust and scorching sun. The repeated message in her winning song was

*"Dunia Mbaya.... Dunia*

*Mbaya. Utakufa bure. Utawacha bwana, utawacha bibi...*

(The world is caught up in problems.

Unless one stops promiscuity, he or she will die off leaving behind loving husbands and wives.)"

Others on stage to launch the

*Jisimamie* campaign included the celebrated musician Ochieng

KabaseIleh, newcomers Lakers based

Choc Generation, local celebrity

Aziz Abdi, Benga maestros

George Ramogi, George

Ojijo, Paul Orwa and D.O. Misiani.

A 20,000-watts sound system was provided by Omega One, instruments by OS International with DJs Don Ben and Jack of Club Royale spinning the discs.

Others are Papa Kilosh, Jack Marley and Jambo Sounds, and three groups of comedians: Vitimbi,

Nyengese and Okunyanyi.

Rib-tickling jokes, harmonious sounds and tantalising voices aside, the message was very powerful:

Play safe sex or go down the drain. No condoms no sex!

The controversial subject about whether to offer sex education to the school-going youth was tackled during a press conference at the launch.

An advisor to the National Aids/STD Control Project (Nascop),

Mr Ivan Hermans, bluntly described how the youths' fate hangs in the balance as the Aids scourge rages:

Religious

"We need to give real information about sex to the youth. If we cannot do so because of religious or cultural factors, then we have to take the consequence which is to let the youth get infected," he said.

The official said that there was no alternative to sex education if the youth were to be saved from contracting the Aids virus.

With the comments coming only two days after President Moi announced that the Government would shelve the controversial family life education sessional paper which was to be debated in

Parliament, Mr Hermans said we were in a do or die situation as far as sex education for the youth was concerned.

His message was that it would be disastrous "for us to bury our heads in the sand and believe there is no sex among the youth”.

The press conference at Kisumu's Imperial Hotel was also attended by Dr Gaturuku, the first secretary in the Belgian embassy,

Mr Gunther Sleewagen and the head of the medical sector at the

Belgian embassy, Dr Mark De Maegd.

Others were a project team leader in the Kenya-Belgian STI Project,

Mr Jack Labeeow, an official from the Ministry of Health, Mr

Meshack Ndolo, and the Nyanza provincial medical officer, Dr

Richard Otieno Muga. Mr Hermans, who is the IEC (information, education and communication) advisor said it was a fact that most of the youth were sexually active and that the only way to save them from contracting

HIV was to counsel them to engage in safe sex.

The official said a recent research revealed that one out of every three upper primary school pupils were sexually active. And that

36 per cent of those in the 10-15 age-groups had already experienced sex.

Mr Hermans said half of secondary school pupils in Nyanza

Province were sexually active, 10 per cent of who used condoms.

His contention was that asking school-going youth to delay sexual activity to a later age alone would not suffice to protect them against the scourge.

"We need to tell them to have safe sex. This is just part of a health education whose benefit would be to save lives," he said.

But Mr Ndolo, a senior official in the Aids project under the ministry of health was quick to react that it was too early to generalize the findings of the research quoted by Mr Hermans.

He said the ministry's position was that there was sex among the youth but this had yet to be quantified.

Mr Ndolo said that their strategy to address sexuality among the youth was to develop materials which told parents how to communicate sex matters to their children.

Similar materials have been made telling teachers how to communicate lessons on Aids and sex.

However, he felt short of explaining whether the same materials would not constitute sex education.

*Jisimamie,* costed at Sh5 million, will soon be launched in the nine districts in Nyanza Province to take the campaign to the district level.

While announcing the shelving of the Family Life Education sessional paper, President Moi had said there were sections in the paper which were a threat to the family structure.

He said the President: "I agree

with the Catholic bishops' stand over this matter."

The President was speaking at a

Catholic Church function at the

Bukhungu Stadium in Kakamega town. The church has earned itself a reputation as the foremost hardliner against sex education in schools and use of contraceptives.

Audience

The President's audience then included the Pope's country representative,

Archbishop Giovani

Tonuchi, Archbishops Ndingi

Mwana,a Nzeki, Zaccheus Okoth, the chairman of the Kenya Episcopal conference, Bishop John Njue,

and others from Uganda and the

Philippines.

However, FLE in schools or no

FLE, most health officials at the

*Jisimamie* launch confided their views that if the spread of Aids among the youth was to be checked, then the best and most effective option would be to be "frank and brave" with the messages.

"] wish one of our prominent figures who is a victim of this virus will go public about his or her condition. This will go a long way in affecting people. It worked in

Uganda when the late Philly Katumba

Lutaya went public," said an official at the launch. His message is that if we had a

Kenyan Lutaya, then the fight against the continued spread of the virus would be half-won.