Sesame Street in Nigeria to Reach 30,000 Children

from news.awn.com

LAGOS, 19 February 2009 — Nigeria possesses the third largest number of HIV-positive adults in the world; and over 1.8 million children are orphaned by AIDS. In a groundbreaking effort to provide resources about HIV and AIDS to Nigerian children and caregivers, Sesame Workshop has partnered with The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Presidents Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to bring a unique SESAME STREET project to Nigeria.

USAID and PEPFAR granted $500,000 to Sesame Workshop toward an educational outreach initiative that includes original videos and workbooks for children featuring SESAME STREET characters and caregiver guides; and is expected to reach 30,000 kids in Nigeria, many of whom are orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs). The initiative, entitled "The Adventures of Kami and Big Bird," launched Wednesday in Abuja.

This morning, Ayobisi Osuntusa, Educational Consultant on "The Adventures of Kami and Big Bird" introduced the project and outreach materials to 15 representatives from four Nigerian states -- Abuja, Ebonyi, Kano and Lagos. Ayobisi is training these representatives to become experts on the materials and trainers themselves. These new trainers will travel to other parts of the country introducing caregivers in schools and orphanages to the materials so they may be implemented in a variety of contexts ranging from classrooms to childcare centers and homes.

In Nigeria, there is a reported prevalence of approximately 240,000 pediatric HIV infections," said Ayobisi. "Education about this disease and how to prevent it needs to begin in early childhood, and who better to construct groundwork for the future than the organization that set the gold standard for educational programming? I am honored to facilitate the launch of this initiative."

In 40 years, Sesame Workshop has never shied away from addressing difficult topics, and our characters have proven successful when approaching complicated subjects in a way that brings comfort and familiarity to young children," said Dr. Charlotte Cole, Sesame Workshop's Vice President of International Education, Research & Outreach. "In Nigeria, where the number of individuals directly affected is high and resources extraordinarily limited, we are hopeful and excited about the opportunity to lay an educational foundation for addressing the reality of HIV/AIDS at an early age, and thank USAID and PEPFAR for making it possible."

Each set of "The Adventures of Kami and Big Bird" outreach materials is comprised of the following items:

-- Five video modules -- each containing a mixture of local live action segments introducing Nigerian children from different cities in their environments telling stories about their lives and animation segments featuring Big Bird from SESAME STREET and Kami, the beloved Muppet from South Africa's TAKALANI SESAME who is HIV positive.

-- A workbook for children containing HIV/AIDS education activities that integrate literacy and math skills.

-- A caregiver guide suggesting the most effective ways to use all materials, and providing tips on how to initiate conversations with children about sensitive topics such as destigmatizing HIV/AIDS and coping with loss, and encourage children to embrace various techniques to express feelings and emotions.

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All materials will be produced in English with pertinent information translated in the indigenous Nigerian languages Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba.

According to UNICEF, there are approximately 13,421,000 preschool-age children in Nigeria, and 10% of these children are enrolled in preschool. While highlighting HIV/AIDS, all above materials focus on a "whole child" curriculum, covering counting, literacy, recognizing healthy foods and other basic skills, as well.

Funding for the creation and distribution of "The Adventures of Kami and Big Bird" outreach materials is made possible by the people of the United States of America through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as well as President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The video modules are produced by Nigerian Production Company Storm Vision with Co-Executive Producers Yemisi Ilo and Remi Ogunpitan.

To access the article online, go to http://news.awn.com/index.php?type=date&newsitem_no=26511

**Nigeria: HIV/AIDS Bill Scales Second Reading**

from allAfrica.com

LAGOS, 3 March 2009 — A bill seeking to prohibit and punish discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS yesterday scaled second reading at the House of Representatives.

Hon Olajumoke Olukoya-Thomas (AC-Lagos), who led the debate, said the bill was seeking to protect the rights and dignity of HIV infected persons and persons living with AIDS.

It seeks "to promote equality, freedom, fairness and respect for the rights of HIV and AIDS infected persons."

"To achieve employment, equity and to protect the rights and dignity of HIV infected workers, including avoiding discriminatory action against them in the provision of employment". It also seeks to prevent the discrimination of persons living with HIV and AIDS with respect to access to housing, commercial premises and medical services," Olukoya-Thomas said.

The bill, after the debate, was referred to the Joint Committees on Human Rights and HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Control. The House also mandated its Committee on Communications to expedite action and submit its report on the problems bedevilling the telecommunications industry.

This was after it had considered a motion on the "Rising incidence of threat to life and other vices via the Global System of Mobile Telecommunication (GSM)". Hon Ekperikpe Ekpo (PDP-Akwa-Ibom) and 41 others, who sponsored the motion, expressed worry over the growing rate of crimes, threat to life, fraud and armed robbery through the instrumentality of GSM.

Ekpo said the House was worried that so many lives had been lost, while confusion and enmity were created among friends, families and leaders through the GSM.

He said that the absence of a data-base of subscribers made it difficult to trace the culprits.

To access the article online, go to http://allafrica.com/stories/200903040065.html

**NIGERIA: Sex in the slums**

from plusnews.org

LAGOS, 8 December 2008 — Ijora Badia in Lagos, Nigeria's former capital city and the country's economic hub is a community virtually without government services.

Poor drainage and sanitation facilities leave a permanent foul odour at the bustling market and most residents must wade through several refuse dumps to reach their destinations; an inadequate public power supply means that noise and fumes from generators permanently fill the air, along with blaring music from the numerous brothels and film houses.

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None of this deters the slum's numerous commercial activities, the most important of which is the sex trade.

Sex work is not legal in Nigeria, but is widespread throughout the country. With virtually no modern infrastructure except for the dilapidated rail line that passes through the area, Ijora Badia is home to hundreds of commercial sex workers who ply their trade day and night, beckoning potential customers from doorways.

Margaret Onah, a coordinator at Safe Haven International, a non-governmental organisation that provides support and health services to commercial sex workers, thought she had seen it all but was unprepared for what she described as "One of the largest concentrations of sex workers in the country - virtually every house in the community housed sex workers," she told IRIN/PlusNews.

Not many of the workers were interested in hearing about the dangers of contracting HIV. "They were quick, however, to say they take necessary precautions, and that they need the money they get to survive," she said. "I left [Ijora] Badia realising that there is a lot of work to do."

Femi Harrison, a volunteer with the International Mobile Educator Organisation, which works to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases in the slum, estimated that there were at least 40 brothels in Ijora Badia, with the smaller establishments each having around 20 rooms and the largest having 120. Many other makeshift structures also provide rooms for sexual transactions, mostly at night.

Sex is big business here," said Lucky, the barman at the Rainbow Hotel, where sex workers pay N300 (US$2.30) per night for a room and charge customers between N400 ($3) and N1,500 ($11.50).

Rita said she started doing sex work after her shop burnt down some years ago. "I am in this trade so that I won't die of hunger," she told IRIN/PlusNews. She tries to protect herself by insisting on condoms, but some of her colleagues said they sometimes make an exception for customers who are willing to pay a premium.

Many of the younger women are from the mid-western part of Nigeria and have been tricked into coming to Lagos by false promises, only to find themselves in the sex industry.

Some of the sex workers commute to Ijora Badia from other parts of Lagos at night and leave in the morning, while others come to work there for a few months. The high level of fluctuation in the population is a challenge to field workers like Harrison.

"If you call a female sex worker now and ask her what she knows about HIV/AIDS or condoms, she may display near total ignorance because she is new in the community," he said. "They move in and move out and that is why our work is a mobile one. We keep drumming the message as new people move in, hoping that they will take necessary precautions."

In 2007 the International Mobile Educator Organisation found that of 100 sex workers who agreed to be tested for HIV, 25 were HIV-positive.

"We can't dictate to people what they should or shouldn't do, but as much as possible we expect people to live responsibly and take the various campaigns against HIV/AIDS more seriously," said Chief Titus Aworetan, a local community leader who believes the government should do more to curb the sex trade in Ijora Badia.

"Considering that many of the sex workers claim they are in it to survive, the government may need to provide necessary amenities and avenues for people to be gainfully employed," he told IRIN/PlusNews.

Harrison pointed out that despite many promises by politicians in the past, not much had been done to improve conditions in the slum.

To access the article online, go to http://www.plusnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=81864

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If you have any comments or questions about this newsletter, please feel free to email REACH@northwestern.edu.

REACH is a collaborative program of Northwestern University and the University of Ibadan with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. REACH aims to improve HIV/AIDS prevention strategies in Nigeria through social science and community-based research.