Love Helps Nigerian Couple Cope with HIV from globalpost.com

ABUJA, 14 February 2009 — Dusk is time for relaxation in Nigeria. The heat of the day ebbs away and, as the sunset bathes dusty streets and shacks in an orange glow, people walk along the streets, greet one another and stop to chat, or sit on benches to watch others pass by.

Emmanuel and Kate Musa often take early evening strolls around their neighborhood on the outskirts of Abuja. They come home to have dinner together with their brood of four children.

At around seven o’clock their youngest daughter, who is 9 years old, says “Daddy it’s time,” and, as usual, she hands him his medicine box. Emmanuel swallows the anti-retroviral pills with a gulp of water. So does his wife. Rather than allowing the disease to tear apart their marriage through angry recriminations and accusations, the Musas have stayed together. The love between the two is palpable and it has sustained their marriage and family.

Nigeria has the world’s second-largest population infected with HIV with an estimated 2.6 million people with the virus. But the battle to stop the spread of the disease is finding success: in 2001 the prevalence rate was 5.8 percent; today it has fallen to 3.6 percent.

Emmanuel, 49, discovered he was HIV positive in 1996. He was lying sick in a hospital bed when he overheard one of the nurses say, “That man has AIDS, he is going to die.”

“Initially I felt that my life was over,” says Emmanuel, recalling that moment 13 years ago. But Kate encouraged him to accept counseling and he learned how to live with HIV and to take the pills that keep him alive.

Three years later while pregnant with their youngest daughter and undergoing a prenatal check-up, Kate found out that she, too, was HIV positive. She went through the same counseling and treatment that Emmanuel had experienced.

Sitting together on a wooden bench in the yard of their little house, the smiling couple are a picture of togetherness and mutual support. It was not always this way. Emmanuel used to be a soldier, posted all over the country. He was also a wayward husband.

“I know I was a bit promiscuous,” he says. “I was around Port Harcourt [in the far south] but I cannot say exactly how I contracted it. The thing is most of us leave home and families, and are gone for months or years.” While away temptation is strong and soldiers have money in a poor country. They — along with prostitutes, truck drivers and youngsters who have just left school — are the most vulnerable to infection.

Experts say the key to preventing the spread of HIV is changing people’s behavior, which is where Emmanuel comes in. He has become a ‘peer educator’ who talks with other men like himself, ex-soldiers and guys his age. They show them how to avoid contracting HIV. His message is to abstain from extra-marital sex, or if you can’t do that then use condoms and be faithful to one sexual partner. If the men are already infected he counsels them on how to live positively with the virus.

Emmanuel has found that being HIV positive has had a surprising effect on him. “Being positive made me have a rethink. I decided I had to change my lifestyle. I had to correct my marriage. It has made me more of a family man,” he says. He enjoys spending time with their children, and he is pleased they all healthy and HIV negative.

It is likely that Kate was infected by her wayward husband but she does not blame him.

“We are closer than before,” she says. Sitting next to her, Emmanuel says happily, “I never knew what I was missing not being close to my wife.”

To access the article online, go to http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/nigeria/090212/love-helps-nigerian-couple-cope-hiv

HIV/Aids Movie Makers Storm Abuja from allafrica.com

NIGERIA, 10 March 2009 — A new movie designed to help in the fight against HIV/AIDS was at the weekend introduced to residents of the Federal Capital Territory and other stakeholders.

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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.

**HIV/AIDS prevention news stories**

"HIV/Aids Movie Makers Storm Abuja" continued, from page 1

The movie titled, "The Gift" and shot in a rural community of Abia State, preaches massages that could help in addressing mother to child transmission of the disease.

Acccording to Tricom Productions Managing Director, Dr. Paul Nwulu, plans are underway to run the movie into several Nigerian Languages in order to create the desired impact in the fight against discrimination and stigmatization of experienced by people living with HIV/AIDS.

Also speaking, Nwulu, a Professor of Mass Communication in the Western Michigan University, USA, said the movie will not be produced for commercial purposes as no copy of it will be sold.

He explained that the essence of venturing into the production of the movie is to partner with stakeholders to address the HIV/AIDS scourge in the country.

"The movie is not designed to stand alone but as a stool to open up a conversation, especially in the area of prevention of mother to child transmission of the virus by technical experts," he added.

The production of the movie, the University Don noted was made possible through donations by the Gospel Communications, a USA based Non Governmental Organisation, which has being in the business of developing gospel works in Africa.

*To access the article online, go to http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=57389*

**Anyone for a female condom?**

*from plusnews.org*

SÃO TOMÊ, 23 February 2009 - Women in São Tomé and Príncipe have a new way to avoid unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

In late January, the initial phase of a government programme, coordinated by the Reproductive Health Programme (known by the Portuguese-language acronym PSR) and the National Programme for the Fight Against AIDS (PNLS), began distributing 3,500 free female condoms.

"This is a special moment for a lot of São Tomenean women," said Maria Tomé, minister of health and the family at a launch ceremony in São Tomé, the capital. Elisabete Carvalho, who coordinates the Health Ministry's Reproductive Health Programme, said the female condom could give women more control over their sexual health. "We want this to give them greater decision-making power, because they're the most vulnerable."

According to data from the Reproductive Health Programme, 12.1 percent of girls experience early pregnancy, while 1.5 percent of São Tomé's approximately 150,000 people are living with HIV.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has donated a limited number of female condoms for the first phase of the campaign. "If there is a major demand, we'll distribute more of them," said PNLS Director Alzira do Rosário.

The condoms are available at hospitals and health centres all over São Tomé and Príncipe, along with information pamphlets about the proper use of the contraceptive. Radio and television stations have been broadcasting messages about the advantages of the female condom before and after popular Brazilian soap operas and the evening news, when audiences are at their peak.

**Women speak**

Tchai Martins, 26, was told about the new contraceptive method during a check-up at the Mother-Infant Centre in São Tomé, but after inspecting the prophylactic, which is 17cm long, she told IRIN/PlusNews: "If I were to change my method, this would be the last one I'd adopt." Mena Xavier, 35 and a mother of three, also had doubts. "São Tomean men are very aggressive. If I bring this home, my husband will think a million different things," she said. "I'll even run the risk of him beating me, because he refuses to have sex with a condom."

Around 30 women per day visit the centre for pre-natal and family planning consultations; in the first week of the initiative, nine of them decided to adopt the new contraceptive method. Adelaide Mendonça, 23, was optimistic that female condoms had the potential to encourage greater autonomy. "Now women can act differently when their partners don't have condoms," she commented.

*To access the article online, go to http://plusnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83093*

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