High Level Group on HIV prevention and sexual health for young people in eastern and southern Africa

The continuing rates of HIV prevalence and the high numbers of new infections among young people in east and southern Africa (ESA) remain of significant concern in the global HIV response. Whilst HIV prevalence and incidence have declined in some high-burden countries over the past decade, these reductions remain insufficient and significant numbers of young people, predominantly young women, are still becoming newly infected.

UNAIDS, in collaboration with UNESCO, GIZ and other co-sponsors, is leading an initiative focused on mobilizing political support to ensure that all young people in ESA have access to high quality, comprehensive life skills-based HIV and sexuality education as well as appropriate young people friendly services. The initiative is led by a High Level Group (HLG) that is facilitating a process aimed at catalyzing urgently needed improvements in education and services to achieve better sexual and reproductive health outcomes. The HLG is composed of regional leaders in education, sexual and reproductive health and rights (including HIV prevention), and development. It is assisted by a Technical Coordinating Group, whose key task is to provide technical, administrative and financial support.

This initiative is chaired by Prof Sheila Tlou, former Minister of Health of Botswana and Director of the UNAIDS Regional Support Team (RST), on behalf and with the support of the Technical Coordinating Group. The first major task for the HLG is to oversee the production of a regional diagnostic report with findings designed to galvanize high-level political support and the eventual goal of a ‘commitment’ to high quality, comprehensive life skills-based HIV and sexuality education agreed by ESA countries’ ministries of education and health.
Members of the High Level Group

Dr Sheila D. Tlou is the Director of the UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Eastern and Southern Africa. She is a former Member of Parliament and Minister of Health of the Republic of Botswana (2004-2009). She is also former Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Nursing and Midwifery Development in Primary Health Care for Anglophone Africa. She has been involved in the AIDS response from the time the HIV epidemic started in Botswana in 1985, and is the founder of the Botswana chapter of the Society of Women and AIDS in Africa (SWAA). During her term as Minister of Health, Dr Tlou led a successful HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support programme in Botswana, whose achievements are still some of the best in Africa. She is also the United Nations Eminent Person for Women, Girls, and HIV in Southern Africa.

H.E. Festus Mogae is the Chairman for Champions for an HIV-Free Generation. He served as the third President of Botswana between 1998 and 2008. Under his leadership, Botswana experienced steady economic growth and became recognized as one of the least corrupt countries in Africa. His time in office was characterized by programmes to develop education and health infrastructure, as well as to privatize parts of the economy, notably the airlines and telecommunications industry. After leaving office, Mr Mogae launched Champions for an HIV-Free Generation, a group of former African Presidents and other influential personalities, which aims to strengthen HIV prevention efforts in Africa. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honours including the 2008 Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership and the Légion d’honneur by French President Nicolas Sarkozy for his ‘exemplary leadership’ in making Botswana a ‘model’ of democracy and good governance.

H.E. Salma Kikwete is the First Lady of the United Republic of Tanzania and founder and Chair of the Wanawake na Maendeleo Foundation (WAMA), a non profit organization committed to increased numbers of economically empowered women, progressive communities and educated healthy children. Mama Kikwete’s vision is backed by the invaluable firsthand knowledge and experience she gained in the more than 20 years she spent as a teacher. She believes that education and health are essential prerequisites in unlocking the potential of many poor Tanzanians to contribute to their country’s development, Africa and the world at large. As a pioneer of girl child education and a child rights advocate, she has received numerous awards and was recently crowned the Champion of Anti Stigma campaigns by the Embassy of the United States in Dar es Salaam. Currently she is the Vice-President of the Organization of African First Ladies Against AIDS (OAFLA), Eastern Region.

David Coltart, a human rights lawyer by profession, was appointed the Minister of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture in Zimbabwe in February 2009. Since his appointment, major strides have been achieved in restoring the education sector in Zimbabwe, particularly through the establishment of the Education Transition Fund which seeks to improve the quality of education and reduce the pupil-textbook ratio. Senator Coltart has delivered numerous papers and speeches in Zimbabwe and internationally on education and constitution and is a strong human rights advocate. He is also actively involved in programmes for young people living with HIV and AIDS.
Dr Fay Chung is an educator who has served in many capacities in the education sector. She headed the Educational Planning Unit in Zimbabwe immediately after independence, and participated in the expansion of the education system from a third of children at primary school and 4% at secondary school to primary school for all and secondary school for 65%. She was Minister of Education and Culture in Zimbabwe from 1988 to 1992 and during her tenure she ensured that HIV and AIDS education was institutionalized into all schools from Grade 3 up to Form 6 (Grade 13). This contributed to the high level of consciousness of young Zimbabweans about HIV and AIDS. She left the Zimbabwe Government in 1993 to join UNICEF as the Head of the Education Cluster in New York and in 1998 she joined UNESCO as the Director of the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa. She is presently the Senior Technical Advisor to the Minister of Education in Namibia.

Fr Michael J. Kelly is a Jesuit priest and retired Professor of Education at the University of Zambia. He is a Zambian citizen who has worked in education in Zambia since 1955. In the early 1990s, in response to the devastating impact of HIV and AIDS on human well-being and educational provision in Africa and elsewhere, he became increasingly involved in analysing and documenting the epidemic’s potential to destabilize education and to undermine development. His specialist AIDS-related areas include issues of orphans and vulnerable children, young people, higher education, teacher preparation, the planning and management of education, policy dimensions and ethical, justice and human rights challenges. His work has been acknowledged by awards from the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Forum for African Women Educationists (Zambia Chapter) and the Irish and Zambian Governments, and by honorary doctorates from the University of the West Indies and the National University of Ireland.

Remmy Shawa is a young leader who has been working in the HIV response and in sexual and reproductive health and rights since 2004. In 2007, he co-founded a project called Men n’ Gender funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in Zambia. This was a project that challenged the negative perceptions of masculinity among young male students in Lusaka. In 2009, Mr Shawa won a competitive special youth fellowship with UNAIDS at the secretariat in Geneva. While at UNAIDS, he organized the first ever Global Youth Consultation on Masculinities, HIV and Violence against Women in November 2009 after attending and being inspired by the MenEngage Africa Symposium in October the same year. He later joined UNAIDS in Lusaka as a consultant for the young people programme and then left to join the World AIDS Campaign in Cape Town as a Global Youth Campaigns Coordinator.

Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, a human rights lawyer, has been the World Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) General Secretary since 2007. She provides leadership for the YWCA movement’s priorities in women’s inter-generational leadership and women’s rights and movement building with a special focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV and AIDS, violence against women, peace with justice and economic empowerment. Prior to that she served as Regional Director for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), now UN Women, and as a human rights officer with UNICEF in Liberia and Zimbabwe. She is the current President of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, Geneva and recently served as Commissioner for the UN Commission on Information and Accountability on Women and Children’s Health. In the past two decades her rights-based work has carried her across the globe as a leader and public speaker.
Dr Harriet Birungi is a medical anthropologist, country director of the Population Council’s Nairobi office, Senior Associate with the Council’s reproductive health programme, and currently serves as co-director on the multi-country project on Strengthening Evidence for Programming on Unintended Pregnancy (STEP UP). Previously, Dr Birungi served as director of a three-year operations research project in Kenya that supported USAID’s AIDS, Population and Health Integrated Assistance Programme, which sought to find innovative ways to improve service delivery through research. She was a long-term grantee of the Ford Foundation, facilitating a series of activities to promote more open and informed discussions around sexuality and chronic illness in east Africa. She also pioneered research on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents in eastern Africa who are perinatally infected with HIV, and continues to advocate for their rights.

Oley Dibba-Wadda is an expert on gender equality in international policy and programming in multicultural and multidisciplinary environments. She is currently the Executive Director of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), a pan-African NGO led and managed by African women for the promotion of gender and education in Africa for women and girls. Before joining FAWE, Ms Dibba-Wadda worked with Oxfam GB as Global Advisor for Gender Equality and prior to that, she managed a multi-country gender equality initiative for the Commonwealth Education Fund in the UK; a £10 million education programme funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) to strengthen gender equality through mentoring in 16 low-income Commonwealth countries in Africa and Asia.

Jemima Nindo has 15 years’ teaching experience and has worked as an administrator at the Teachers Service Commission AIDS Control Unit in Nairobi, Kenya, since 2007. She is a member of the Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors, Kenya Network of HIV Positive Teachers (KENEPOTE, where she serves as the national treasurer) and Network for Empowerment of People Living with HIV in Kenya (NEPHAK). She also participated in the Courage and Hope: African Teachers Living with HIV documentary. This film has now been adapted as a tool to teach about HIV stigma and discrimination in Kenyan schools and beyond.

Lucien Kouassi Kouakou is the Regional Director for the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Africa Region. He has more than 20 years of experience in sexual and reproductive health and rights in Africa. He is a pure product of the IPPF, having worked with the Member Association of Cote d’Ivoire (Association Ivoirienne pour le Bien-Etre Familial) in various positions, starting in 1992 as the Operational Research Coordinator. He then moved on to become Welfare Project Coordinator, followed by Chief of Community Based Distribution and Service Provisions Divisions, then Programme Director and finally, he served as Executive Director for five years. During his time with the Association he provided peer-to-peer technical assistance to many other Member Associations within IPPF and achieved significant results, such as increased confidence and trust from donors and partners.