

**USING PODCASTS TO
DELIVER YOUTH-FRIENDLY
INFORMATION ABOUT SEXUAL
AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
AND RIGHTS IN BURUNDI**

CASE STUDY

ABOUT FRONTLINE AIDS

Frontline AIDS wants a future free from AIDS for everyone, everywhere.

Around the world, millions of people are denied HIV prevention, testing, treatment and care simply because of who they are and where they live.

As a result, 1.7 million people were infected with HIV in 2018 and 770,000 died of AIDS-related illness.

Together with partners on the frontline, we work to break down the social, political and legal barriers that marginalised people face, and innovate to create a future free from AIDS.

ABOUT iREADY

i-READY supports and creates information and communication technology tools that can be used by adolescents and young people in Burundi and Mozambique to promote access to information on SRHR, peer support and adherence to HIV treatment. It is supported by the SPIDER centre (<https://spidercenter.org/>).

iREADY is part of the READY portfolio of programmes that aim to build resilient and empowered adolescents and young people. Young people helped create the READY movement and remain the core of it today. Read more, and find out how to join the READY movement: <https://frontlineaids.org/our-work-includes/ready/>

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YOUNG PEOPLE AND HIV

AIDS-related illness is the leading cause of death for young people in sub-Saharan Africa. Around a third (35%) of all new HIV infections occur among people aged 15-24, making this group exceptionally vulnerable.

In Burundi, two out of three people are under 25 years old. An estimated 9,300 adolescents (10-19 years) are living with HIV.

Young people who sell sex, use drugs or are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) are even more vulnerable to HIV because they are stigmatised and criminalised. This means they have less access to information and health services than other young people.

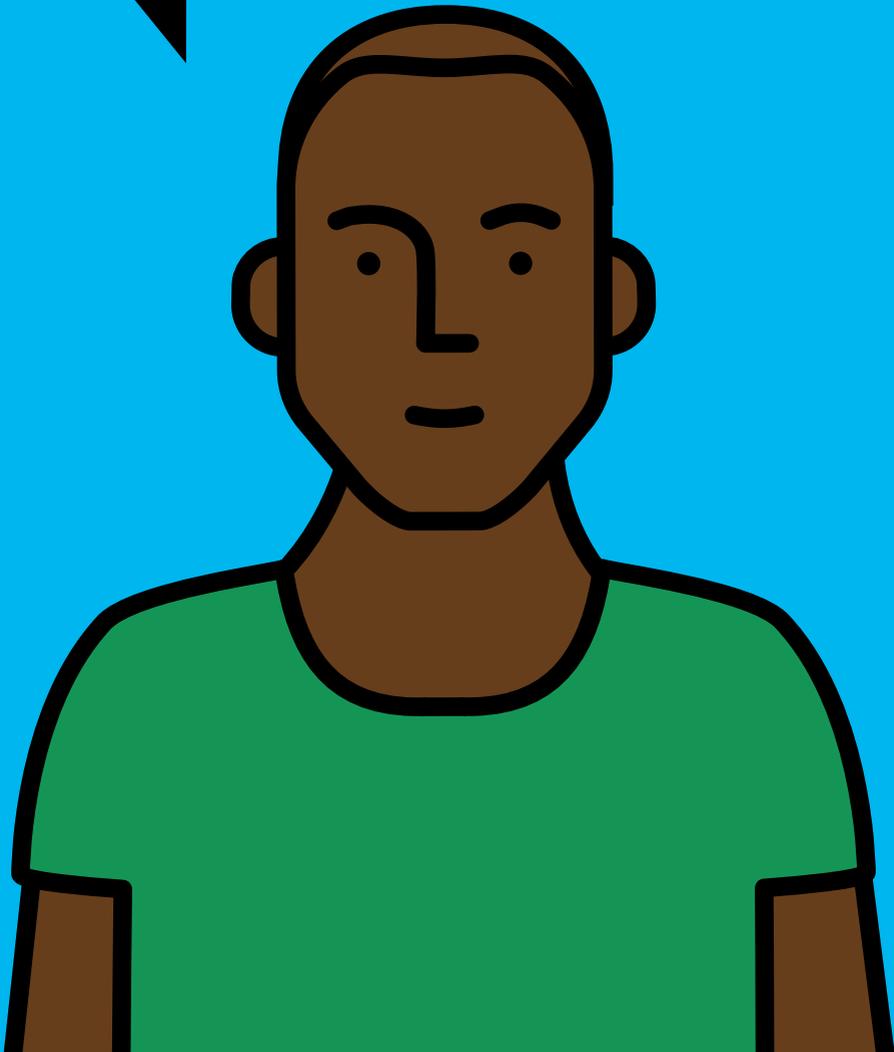
LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT SEX!

A lack of access to information about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and a shortage of spaces where young people feel comfortable and secure to discuss these issues help to fuel young people's vulnerability to HIV.

Because sex is considered a taboo subject, it's often difficult for young people to talk about it with their parents or guardians. Neither can they get adequate information at school as comprehensive sexuality education is generally not provided.

In addition, broadcast media such as television and radio is heavily regulated and censored. SRHR-related programmes are not available during the time young viewers are most likely to be around, as such topics are considered suitable only for mature audiences.

” The Kirundi phrase ‘uriko uvuga ibishegu’ is loosely translated as ‘you are speaking obscenities’. This is the response young people in Burundi often get when they attempt to seek information about sexual health.



USING TECHNOLOGY TO REACH YOUNG PEOPLE

We live in a digital age where, for many of us, all the information we need is just a click away. In Burundi, as in the rest of the world, young people are often the most active users of information communication technology (ICT).

Frontline AIDS saw an opportunity to use ICT to provide adolescents with both SRHR information and safe spaces to engage with their peers and experts. Whilst 'ICT for health' is a frequent topic among HIV and SRHR organisations in Burundi, using ICT to improve access to youth-friendly and comprehensive HIV and SRHR information was something new.

Initially we partnered with SPIDER, a centre that supports the digitalisation of international development, which conducted a baseline and needs assessment. The results showed that close to 40% of the young people surveyed had mobile phones and 12% had internet. The average time spent on social media was five hours a day. Online activities included communicating with friends, watching movies and listening to music. In addition, 24% listened to radio on a daily basis, and close to 20% watched TV. These findings told us that digital solutions were a viable approach to reach young people.

We also partnered with ABS (Alliance Burundaise contre le SIDA et pour la Promotion de la Santé), a national network of over 100 HIV organisations,

and RNJ+ (Réseau National des Jeunes vivant avec le VIH), a youth-led network of people living with HIV that provides peer-led HIV and SRHR services to people living with HIV, young LGBT people and young people who sell sex.

ABS and RNJ+ were part of the multi-country READY Teens programme, which ended in December 2018. READY Teens provided comprehensive SRHR services and built the capacity of youth leaders to create safe spaces for adolescents from marginalised groups to talk about sexual and reproductive health.

iREADY was implemented in the districts of Bujumbura and Makamba, both of which have a higher-than-average HIV prevalence.



WHAT WE DID

THE IREADY PROJECT WAS DESIGNED AROUND FOUR COMPONENTS:

- Producing and broadcasting the radio show Ma Voix Mon Choix (My Voice My Choice)
- Airing public service announcements for adolescents
- Disseminating podcasts from Ma Voix Mon Choix on radio websites
- Using social media sites during and following radio broadcasts to engage listeners

TRAINING YOUNG PEOPLE TO PRODUCE RADIO SHOWS

RNJ+ hired a journalist and a SRHR expert to train 20 young people on SRHR, producing radio programmes and using social media. The trainees included 15 young people living with HIV, a gay man, a transgender person, a person who uses drugs and a sex worker.

DISSEMINATING THE SHOW

RNJ+ began preparing contracts with two radio stations, Radio Isanganiro and Radio Izere, to air the radio programmes as they awaited approval from the Ministry of Health. However, the broadcasting wasn't approved. So ABS and RNJ+ instead developed podcasts and disseminated them via Soundcloud, a music and podcast streaming platform, and RNJ+'s network of young people on Facebook and WhatsApp.

PRODUCING YOUTH-FRIENDLY PODCASTS

The young podcast makers produced content that spoke to the lived realities of young people in Burundi. The podcasts included conversations between young people on a variety of topics, including:

- Discrimination faced by young people living with HIV
- Unplanned pregnancies among adolescent girls and young women
- Young people who use drugs and their vulnerability to HIV
- Taking your antiretrovirals correctly
- How to prevent getting sexually transmitted infections
- How to live positively with HIV as a young person
- Sugar daddies and sugar mummies
- How to deal with sexual violence

The podcasts featured a variety of guests who were young people themselves and incorporated hit songs from popular artists, making the content appealing to young people.

All the podcasts were conducted in Kirundi, the local language, so young people could easily understand them.

Each episode is short (3-8 minutes long). This means they can easily be shared on social media and easily streamed or downloaded and played at the listener's convenience.



ENSURING PEOPLE'S SAFETY

A major concern in this project was ensuring the safety and security of people featuring in the podcasts. People who sell sex, members of the LGBT community, and people who use drugs run the risk of being arrested, attacked or even killed for openly coming out.

Mindful of these risks, RNJ+ offered people the option of participating in the podcasts anonymously by using pseudonyms and/or by altering their voices. They also recorded the programmes in places where participants felt safe and comfortable. As part of RNJ+'s duty of care to participants, staff responded to any human right violations experienced by the participants and made referrals to appropriate services.

WHAT WE ACHIEVED

By the end of the project, 22 podcasts had been produced and disseminated, helping young people to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health and to live positively with HIV.

“ I thought I was all alone. I was raped at a party 5 years ago when I was 14 and was infected with HIV. For many years since I found out I was HIV positive, I was waiting to die. Nobody believed my rape story in my family. I had no one to talk to. When I listened to Rosin from RNJ+ on the iREADY podcast, I knew that I was not alone and could get access to healthcare in Makamba Clinic. *Nadia from Makamba*

WHAT WE LEARNED

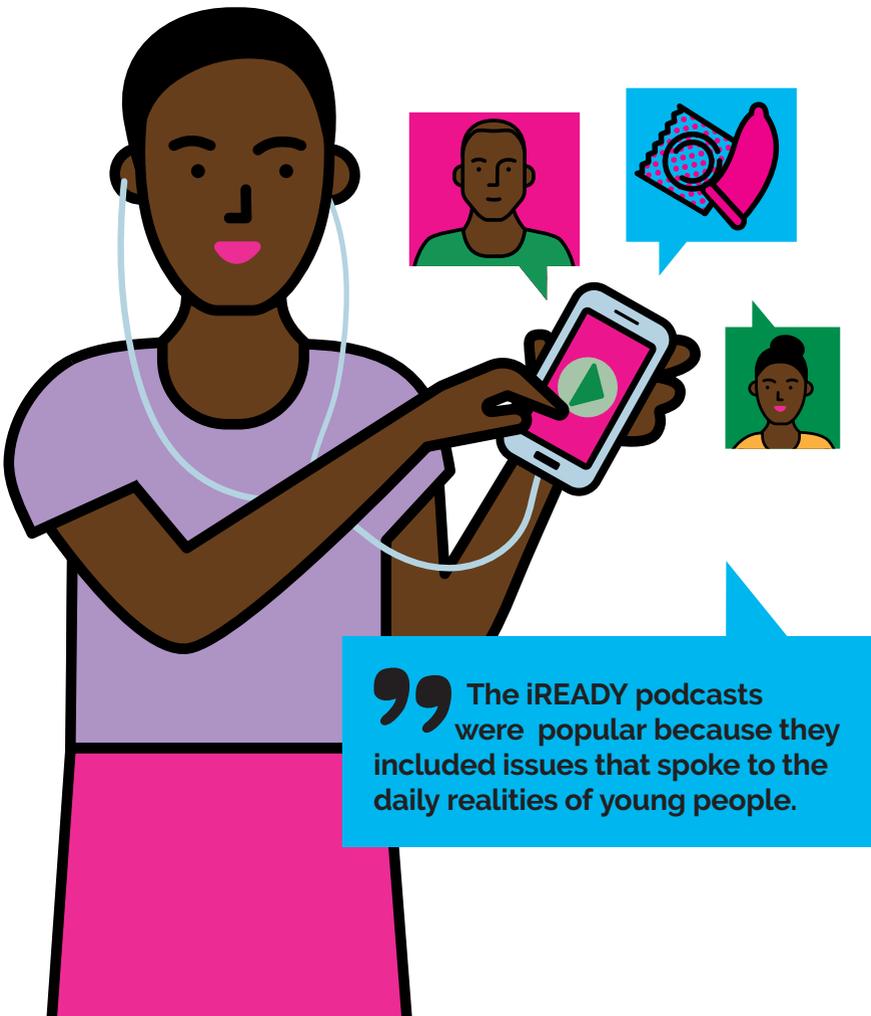


- Adolescents and young people who sell sex, use drugs, are LGBT or live with HIV want to listen to people with similar experiences. The iREADY podcasts were popular because they included issues that spoke to the daily realities of young people.
- To guarantee permission to broadcast SRHR-related content it's important to obtain formal commitments, such as memorandums of understanding, with the relevant government agencies or regulatory authorities early on in the project.
- When working with marginalised people, organisations need to be adequately prepared to ensure the safety of participants and respond to any human rights violations.

WHAT'S NEXT

RNJ+ is exploring with radio stations whether the podcasts can be disseminated as paid-for public service announcements via radio.

Partners are still working with the government and its partners to make comprehensive sexuality education part of the national school curriculum. Podcasts and other ways of using ICT can be part of that.



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