

READY

RESILIENT & EMPOWERED
ADOLESCENTS & YOUNG PEOPLE

#YouthAgainstCOVID19 #READY4UHC



COVID-19 edition – part 1

This newsletter is dedicated to Trevor Chirimambowa who died on 30 April 2020. Those who were touched by him understood that the quality of existence is more important than the length of one's life. He was a pillar of strength, support and discipline. I owe my success and my life in general to him. His motivational talks and inspirational words will stick with me and all the other young people he came into contact with. His memory and legacy will live on through us and through the organisation. He will forever be remembered. Rest in peace Mr Trevor Chirimambowa – father and friend to all.

BY LEROY SIBANDA
DEVELOPMENT FACILITATOR, MILLION MEMORY PROJECT ZIMBABWE (MMPZ)

Welcome to this special edition of the READY newsletter. We've got so much to say about COVID-19 that we're producing two editions. This is part one, with the second out later this month. Something to look forward to!

The world is in chaos and the response is happening very quickly. For many young people, including adolescents and young people living with HIV, this is abstract. So much information is circulating, but not all of it is reliable. Young people who don't have access to modern communication platforms have limited trustworthy information on COVID-19. They need to know how to avoid getting COVID-19, and how to support each other and their peers who are on antiretroviral therapy (ART) to live happy, healthy and safe lives. That's why READY partners have produced a range of accessible resources (see overleaf).



What are the challenges faced by people living with HIV, including adolescents and young people? And what can we learn from communities' responses to COVID-19? To find out, the Global Network of Young People Living with HIV (Y+ Global), Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+) and International Community of Women Living with HIV (ICW) conducted a survey. Results show serious concerns about access to healthcare and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, human rights violations, increased stigma and discrimination, and loss of income for many young people living with HIV. At this difficult time, protecting mental wellbeing is crucial. So Y+ Global, Youth Stop AIDS and Newcastle University (UK) are also conducting a global survey to find out how HIV affects the mental health of young people living with HIV.

In this newsletter, you'll read about the impact of COVID-19 on young people. Some are living hand to mouth, some are struggling to access ART, and others are being forced to disclose their status. Some marginalised young people have had to leave their homes. But young people are also part of the response: adapting, engaging in advocacy and activism, and as resilient peer supporters finding innovative ways to help others.

Tinashe Rufurwadzo

TINASHE RUFURWADZO
COMMUNICATION, EVIDENCE AND INFLUENCE ADVISOR, Y+ GLOBAL

CATS chat

BY SUNGANO BONDAYI, COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, AFRICAID

On a normal working day, Community Adolescent Treatment Supporters (CATS) are out and about, offering peer support and acting as a link between their clients and health facilities. That's all changed with virtual service provision. And young people living with HIV have noticed the CATS' absence. They looked forward to their clinic appointments where a peer would provide support and show interest in their lives. We asked some CATS in Bulawayo and Masvingo, Zimbabwe what they think about the change.



How can you still provide support and care without visiting your clients at home?

“Africaid is helping us make sure we do all we can by giving us airtime to follow up on our clients. They provide daily updates on COVID-19 and give us topics and new ideas on how to facilitate e-support groups.”

What makes it difficult for you to support your clients?

“Providing care and support over the phone means I can't see their emotional reactions when we have counselling sessions. I can't quickly identify cases of abuse, I am unable to observe if they are doing well. I have to rely on their word.”

What are the biggest challenges facing your clients?

“Though the government is encouraging people to go to their nearest facility, clients on second-line [ART] are being turned away from local clinics since they don't have second-line medicine. This means they still have to visit big city hospitals and go through security checkpoints.”

Are you getting enough support?

“I'm spending more time indoors with my family and this has strengthened their support in making sure I am adherent. It's easy for them to notice changes in my emotions.”

CATS and their clients face many challenges as lockdown continues. But CATS are adapting, happy to support their peers and help them stay healthy.

“We are reaching out to CATS to show them love and compassion. We are there for them when they experience extreme stress. We've been encouraging CATS not to neglect their elderly caregivers, like their grandparents, if they're living with them. And if they are no longer living with them, we help CATS understand how important it is to keep in touch.”

KIMARA PEER EDUCATORS AND HEALTH PROMOTERS,
IMPLEMENTING PARTNER, DAR ES SALAAM REGION, TANZANIA



BY FUTHI SHONGWE, PROJECT MANAGER, ESWATINI NETWORK OF YOUNG POSITIVES (ENYP+)

One day in April, I caught the bus to go for my routine refill of medication. On the way, the police asked me where I was going and I said the hospital. They wanted proof but I said my condition was confidential. They then told me to get off the bus and go home if I couldn't prove I was going to the clinic. I had to tell them I was collecting my ART. Still they insisted on proof. All I had was my ART booklet, and I ended up having to show it in front of all the other passengers. I felt upset because my rights to privacy, dignity and respect were violated. I know I'm not the first person to go through this.

As an activist, I've learnt that to bring about change you need to stand up for what you believe in and be wise and mature too. That day, I could have been loud and aggressive, yet I decided to be cool, calm and collected – focused on getting the police officers to realise that making people show proof that they're going to hospital violates their human rights.

Disclosure is a choice. Even if we're openly living with HIV that doesn't mean we want to be reminded of it every single day. The response to COVID-19 should be rights-based, otherwise people won't go for treatment out of fear of being victimised.

For some time, we've been actively engaged in advocacy with high-ranking police officers to change the situation on the ground. And just recently, we've seen an improvement throughout the country. Now when you say you're going to hospital they don't force you to show evidence.

Unlocking access to health services under lockdown

BY SYLVESTER EGUMIRE NNYOMBI, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, UGANDA NETWORK OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV (UNYPA)

In Uganda, lockdown has brought to light something we've always known about young people: their energy and willingness to help. When it became difficult to visit health centres to get our medication, our young ambassadors found a solution, unlocking access to health services.

You have to understand what lockdown means for many young people living with HIV. For some, school is a refuge from the gender-based violence (GBV) they experience at home. Others enjoy school because they haven't yet found the courage to disclose their status to their parents. And for others, lockdown means having to sneak out to access medication and counselling services.

Our young ambassadors, some on bikes and others on foot, set out to resolve these issues. They combed their communities, practising and promoting proper handwashing, delivering ART and condoms, offering counselling and personal hygiene tips, and increasing awareness of GBV. Originally, they planned to deliver just ART but they've expanded their services beyond HIV.

This isn't without its challenges. For example, if you deliver medication to an adolescent girl and her father demands to know why you're there, what do you do? That's what happened to Peter Mweru in Mbale District – here's his [blog](#). And how do you shield peers from stigma when their friends realise you're delivering treatment but weren't aware of their friend's status?

We are calling on Uganda's national COVID-19 task force to include our young ambassadors in their plans because they clearly are a wonderful resource. For a long time, we've said young people want to be useful – to make a difference – and this shows how true that is.

Other news Y+ Global READY for action with the HER Voice Fund

BY MAXIMINA JOKONYA, HER VOICE FUND COORDINATOR, Y+ GLOBAL

All of us at Y+ Global are delighted to announce that this year we will manage the HER Voice Fund – a Global Fund initiative supported by ViiV Healthcare Positive Action to ensure adolescent girls and young women have a say in decisions that affect their health. We were chosen because of our:

- Significant experience working for and with young people living with and affected by HIV.
- Strong youth-led and youth-owned networks in all 13 priority HER Voice Fund countries, including the READY+ countries Eswatini, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.
- Proven track record in advocating for policies and programmes that are relevant to the health and wellbeing of young people – such as READY to Lead and leading movements like READY – and ensuring that young people's voices are represented and heard.

"Nobody will tell our stories better than us or feel our pain better than we do," said Brenda Formin, HER Voice Fund Ambassador. "For once, we witnessed an organisation that still walks the path of young people owning the HER Voice Fund space. This doesn't only bring creativity, diversity and efficiency but also exceptional professionalism."

The HER Voice Fund supports the meaningful engagement and leadership of adolescent girls and young women in Global Fund and related national processes. Networks or community-based organisations must be based in one of the 13 eligible countries and work with and for adolescent girls and young women in one or two of these areas: gathering information and stories, policy and advocacy, training and mentoring for advocacy, and monitoring and accountability. More information can be found [here](#).

Dates for the diary FOLLOW THE MOVEMENT!

Many national, regional and international meetings have been cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19, and many are now virtual.

June	Pride Month
16 June	International Day of the African Child
23–25 June	UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board
26 June	Support. Don't Punish: Global Day of Action
July to October	HIV2020 Online
6–10 July	AIDS 2020: Virtual
11 July	World Population Day

Support the READY movement by following these events and posting to:

[f](#) READYmovement [t](#) @READY_Movement [i](#) @readymovement

using #WeAreREADY #READY4UHC #YouthAgainstCOVID19.

Also visit <https://frontlineaids.org/ready> and www.yplusnetwork.org/ready-movement/ for news and updates.

The female face of COVID-19

BY NYASHA SITHOLE, REGIONAL LEAD, YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP, ADVOCACY AND TRAINING, ATHENA NETWORK

COVID-19 is creating a series of hard choices. At one level: do I pay for healthcare or food? One young woman in ATHENA's virtual learning space said, "My friend – 23 years old, single, an orphan and also a mother – has been feeding her baby with porridge only for the past three days." Many young mothers living with HIV, working in the informal economy as market sellers, cleaners or casual workers, can no longer support themselves financially. This dependence on others fuels vulnerability to GBV and domestic abuse. And their autonomy is eroded in other ways too: by having to disclose their HIV status when passing through roadblocks on the way to collect ART or resort to municipal clinics where they pay for services.

The epidemic affects women, men and trans people in their diversity differently. That's why communities must be part of the response so that these realities can be considered. What social protection measures are in place to reduce the impact of shutting down the informal economy? Access to services should balance women's need for contraception, maternal healthcare and other SRH services with transport options, privacy and confidentiality. No one should have to choose between disclosing their HIV status and gaining police permission to access services.

As resources are diverted from HIV and SRH programmes to support the COVID-19 response, we need accountability to adolescent girls and young women. This means funding feminist-led organisations so that young women in their diversity can claim their rights. READY advocates must be paid to share knowledge, provide peer support and mobilise their communities.

Resources: READY for COVID-19

COVID-19 is a new virus and we still have much to learn. Trustworthy information can be hard to come by, and young people living with and affected by HIV have burning questions that need answering. Unfortunately, we're seeing just how easy it is for misinformation to spread in many of our communities. This not only jeopardises people's ability to stay safe but can also heighten anxiety and stigma in an already challenging time.

READY partners have produced these resources, many in different languages, to demystify COVID-19 and offer clear, positive advice for young people, caregivers, healthcare providers and implementing partners:

- READY's practical [guides](#) on keeping young people healthy (WhatsApp versions also available!).
- Africaid's colourful [videos](#) encouraging young people to adhere to their ART while looking after themselves and each other.
- PATA's [Action Plan](#) reinstating their commitment to supporting frontline health workers.
- [Q+A](#) by Y+ Global and UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa for adolescents and young people living with HIV.
- REPSSI's psychosocial support [presentations](#) covering topics ranging from positive masculinity to social connectedness.
- [Newsletters](#) by GNP+, ICW and Y+ Global on positive living in the time of COVID-19.



Thank you!

Y+ Global and Frontline AIDS would like to thank our current READY partners: Africaid, AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA), Aidsfonds, Alliance Burundaise contre le SIDA (ABS), Alliance Côte d'Ivoire (ANS-CI), ATHENA, Community Organisation of Youth against HIV Uganda (COYAA), Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organisations (CANGO), Education as a Vaccine (EVA), ENYP+, GNP+, ideaLab, India HIV/AIDS Alliance, Marie Stopes International Uganda, M&C Saatchi World Services, Network of Young People Living with HIV and AIDS in Tanzania (NYP+), Nakaseeta Initiative for Adult Education and Development (NIFAED), Organisation for Social Services, Health and Development (OSSHD), Paediatric - Adolescent Treatment Africa (PATA), Peer to Peer Uganda (PEERU), Positive Vibes, Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI), REJUSIDA Mozambique, Réseau des Jeunes vivant avec le VIH au Burundi (RNJ+), Stop AIDS Alliance, UNYPA, Young Africa, Youth LEAD, Youth RISE, Youth4UHC Movement and Zimbabwe Young Positives (ZY+).

We would like to thank the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Comic Relief and the MAC AIDS Fund for their support.

