

# TOWARDS THE FINISH LINE: YOUTH AND UNIVERSAL ACCESS 2010



## WHAT IS UNIVERSAL ACCESS?

Universal access is the global commitment to make HIV prevention, testing, treatment, care and support services available to all those in need. This commitment is based on measurable, time-bound and realistic national targets specific to each country. During the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) in 2001, Member States adopted a series of time-bound targets, which were reaffirmed at the 2006 High Level Meeting on AIDS<sup>1</sup>. Universal access was committed to during the 2005 G8 in Gleneagles, reaffirmed at the UN World Summit in 2005 and the UNGASS high level meeting in 2006.

Specifically, universal access means access for "all people all over the world to education and counseling, multi-sectoral care and support services, and health services, including medicines, that will: prevent the transmission of HIV; support persons living with HIV, their families and those who care for them, in living longer with HIV and slowing the onset of AIDS related illness; help AIDS affected families in mitigating the effects of the illness and death on their own households and communities<sup>2</sup>."

We are just two years away from the 2010 target for achieving universal access. While progress has been made, the target is far from being met. Millennium Development Goal #6 underlines the urgency of the need for universal access, setting the target for 2015: To halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV and the incidence of malaria and other major diseases<sup>3</sup>. Yet as of 2007, an estimated 33.2 million people were living with HIV, 5.4 million of who were young people 15-24 years of age<sup>4</sup>. Gender inequality reduces the ability of young women (especially those who are married) to negotiate condom use and access services. Nowadays, in sub-Saharan Africa, this is reflected by the fact that three young women are infected for every young man<sup>5</sup>.

## TOWARDS UNIVERSAL ACCESS

The Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS from the 2006 High Level Meeting on AIDS explicitly states the need to ensure an HIV-free future generation through the implementation of comprehensive, evidence-based prevention strategies for young people<sup>6</sup>. Specific mandates outlined in the Declaration include:

- **Committing to the implementation of comprehensive prevention strategies that promote responsible sexual behavior, including the use of condoms, and pledging to promote access to HIV and AIDS education, information, voluntary counseling and testing and related services;**
- **Committing to an intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and members of vulnerable groups; and**
- **Pledging to eliminate gender inequalities, gender-based abuse and violence, and to increase the capacities of women and girls to protect themselves from HIV infection, principally through the provision of health care and services.**

The 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (Doc) specifically recognises the role that young people play in the response to HIV, acknowledging "the particular role and significant contribution of people living with HIV/AIDS, young people and civil society actors in addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS in all its aspects, and recognising that their full involvement and participation in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of programs is crucial to the development of effective responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic."

# WHERE ARE WE NOW?

In early 2006, a review found that considerable progress had been made towards achieving the goals of the DoC, but also that many countries had failed to fulfill their pledges<sup>7</sup>. Progress toward universal access is measured with specific indicators that evaluate the effectiveness of HIV education on a national scale. Youth are a key component of these indicators, yet statistics and other reliable data on youth continue to be scarce, and, as a result, young people's needs are often overlooked in national AIDS strategies<sup>8</sup>. Young people are less likely to access health services than children or adults and fear of disclosure to family members impedes young people from seeking testing and/or treatment<sup>9</sup>. Young people living with HIV have special needs and rights that demand their targeted involvement in the design and implementation of policies and programming.

According to the 2001 DoC, member states pledged to ensure that 95% of young people aged 15 to 24 would have accurate knowledge of HIV by 2010. However, as of 2007, only 40% of young men and 36% of young women could correctly identify ways of preventing transmission and reject the major misconceptions about HIV transmission<sup>10</sup>. Thus, it is no surprise

then that in 2007, approximately 40 percent of all new HIV infections among those aged 15 years and above occurred among young people between 15-24 years of age<sup>11</sup>. We have two years left to work with governments, development partners, teachers, parents, health care providers and young people to bridge these gaps and make available and accessible the information and services to help us protect ourselves.

In addition, measures must be taken to effectively respond to stigma and discrimination against young people; to ensure that comprehensive sexuality education is available and accessible to all youth; to provide health services and counseling that are confidential and non-judgmental; and to provide specific services for young women and girls. In all these areas, it is necessary to increase the meaningful involvement of young people, particularly young people living with HIV. Universal access will not be achieved without inclusion and participation.

# WHAT CAN I DO?

HIV has been part of our reality for about 25 years and young people continue to be one of the most affected groups. The challenges posed demand young peoples' innovative solutions. Young people are the most critical resource in the global efforts to overcome prejudices and prevent the spread of HIV. We need your help to demand accountability for fulfilling the commitments that have been made on universal access. Here is what you can do:

- **Protect yourself and help your peers protect themselves;**
- **Be informed** on the issues through resources like [www.ua2010.org](http://www.ua2010.org);
- **Lobby leaders to make commitments and follow-up to ensure that these commitments are honored.** Find out who in your country is working on HIV and AIDS issues and try to arrange a meeting with them to ensure that the voices of youth are being heard. It is important that decision-makers feel accountable to young people and that they know that youth advocates and campaigners are paying attention and are empowered to stand up for their rights and the rights of their peers<sup>12</sup>;
- **Engage in monitoring government and civil society efforts to meet youth targets** in order to present a balanced view and voice the diverse concerns of young people;
- **Mobilise and campaign around key events**, such as World AIDS Day (1 December of each year). You can find information on key HIV and AIDS events for youth at [http://www.worldaidscampaign.info/index.php/en/campaigns/key\\_constituencies/youth](http://www.worldaidscampaign.info/index.php/en/campaigns/key_constituencies/youth); and
- **Reach out to networks** – talk to other young activists and campaigners about HIV and AIDS issues and initiate partnerships to bring your shared knowledge and service to the community. You can also partner with other constituencies, such as people living with HIV, women, faith, labour, parliamentarians, media, business, children, academia and non-governmental organisations, to advance the cause of universal action by 2010.



<sup>1</sup> General Assembly Report of the UN Secretary General, "Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: midway to the Millennium Development Goals." April 1, 2008. Other key processes in relation to universal access include the 2005 World Summit, as well as the 2005 Gleneagles G8 Summit.

<sup>2</sup> World AIDS Campaign <http://www.ua2010.org/>

<sup>3</sup> "The MDGs – Are we on track?" UN CHRONICLE, VOLUME XLIV NUMBER 4, 2007

<sup>4</sup> WHO/UNICEF "Global Consultation on Strengthening the Health Sector Response to Care, Support, Treatment and Prevention for Young People Living with HIV." (Meeting report) Blantyre, Malawi, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> UNAIDS, 2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic

<sup>6</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2006 High-Level Meeting on AIDS. Uniting the world against AIDS. May, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations General Assembly 2006 High-Level Meeting on AIDS. Uniting the world against AIDS. May, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Kumar, Smita (Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation), Kristin Mmari (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health), William Barnes (George Washington University) Jeffrey Birnbaum, "Programming Considerations for Youth-Friendly HIV Care and Treatment Services." May, 2008 UNAIDS 2007 AIDS Epidemic Update

<sup>9</sup> WHO/UNICEF "Global Consultation on Strengthening the Health Sector Response to Care, Support, Treatment and Prevention for Young People living with HIV." (Meeting Report) Blantyre, Malawi, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> General Assembly Report of the UN Secretary General, "Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: midway to the Millennium Development Goals." April 1, 2008

<sup>11</sup> UNAIDS (2007) *AIDS epidemic update: Core slides: Global Summary of the HIV and AIDS epidemic*. UNAIDS, Geneva. [http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/HIVData/Epidemiology/epi\\_slides.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/HIVData/Epidemiology/epi_slides.asp)

<sup>12</sup> [www.youthaidscoalition.org](http://www.youthaidscoalition.org)