

# Children Radio Foundation: Taking The HIV/AIDS Message To Young People

By Mantoe Phakathi

**C**APE TOWN – With a voice recorder in his right hand and earphones firmly fixed to his ears, 16-year-old Katongo Kampemba whizzes past delegates, randomly stopping some for brief interviews.

On a busy day with a number of meetings running concurrently at the 17th International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA) in Cape Town, South Africa, he has to hop from one conference room to another.

The grade 10 pupil of Mukuba Secondary School in Zambia's mining town of Kitwe, is covering the five-day conference, which has attracted over 10,000 delegates from different parts of the world.

"You have to be very creative on how you package the message so that the young people can be interested to listen," says Kampemba, pausing a bit to take a firm grip on his radio equipment. "I am here with my colleagues to report on HIV and AIDS because it affects us very much as young people."

From his interviews, Kampemba is compiling brief reports and posting them online so that his peers, not only back home in Zambia but across the world, are able to read the HIV and AIDS stories as reported by one of their peers.

Unlike the conventional journalists from diverse media organisations, who are eager to report on everything going on at the Conference, Kampemba is very specific in his approach: "I am only focusing on HIV/AIDS as it affects young people. I want to tell these [stories] to young people in a way they can identify with so [that] they are able to listen," he says.

Kampemba is one of the reporters with the Children Radio Foundation, an initiative funded

by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) to groom young journalists in five African countries: Zambia, South Africa, Tanzania, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

According to Shantha Bloemen, chief of communication for the UNICEF Africa Service Unit, the initiative was introduced to amplify the voice of young people on various issues affecting the continent, including HIV and AIDS.

"Issues need to be disseminated to, and accepted by, young people in Africa, and the best way is to use the young people themselves. The packages they are producing here will go back to reach out to their colleagues," Bloemen says.

"Interestingly, this is building the skills of young journalists, which is critical to the future of Africa; Africa needs a cadre of new journalists who will help in the development of Africa."

In their home countries, the young reporters also work closely with the local media organisations and youth-based non-governmental organisations to sharpen their reporting skills.

Kampemba says in Zambia, he works with a team of other students from Kitwe to produce a 30-minute programme, which is broadcast every Saturday on the local radio station, Flava FM. It tackles various issues affecting young people.

"This is an interactive programme that discusses issues of climate change and HIV/AIDS which affect young people across Africa. Premarital sex and drug use are others issues affecting young people that make them end up contracting HIV; we discuss them also," adds the young broadcaster.

Asked what could be the most outstanding



Young journalist, Katongo Kampemba interviewing a delegate from Zambia, Victor Kalobwe. Credit: Mantoe Phakathi

message from the ICASA for him, Kampemba says "it is the high infection rate among young people."

On December 5, 2013, UNICEF released the "Children and AIDS: Sixth Stocktaking Report" which says there were 300,000 new infections among adolescents aged 15–19 years in 2012, a modest decline by 36 percent from 470,000 in 2001.

The report also shows that children are not benefitting as much as adults from the progress made in low- and middle- income countries in antiretroviral treatment coverage.

Kampemba says part of the reason why children have not benefitted much from the HIV and AIDS interventions is "because of the way information on HIV/AIDS is packaged. The youth is often criticised for not showing interest on HIV/AIDS issues, yet the messages are packaged in such a way that they are not appealing to young people; like in an interactive debate or interesting commentary."

For more information on the Children Radio Foundation, visit [www.childrenradiofoundation.org](http://www.childrenradiofoundation.org) or [www.voicesofyouth.org](http://www.voicesofyouth.org)



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