

RESPONSE TO HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC IN THE GLOBAL BLACK COMMUNITY : BY UGO AGWU-NNACHI (NIGERIA)

Blacks, no doubt, have been through series of dehumanizing phases in their lives all over the globe. This has given rise to frustrations and poverty at different levels in the black race, and as a result, has exposed them to some behaviors which are risk factors for HIV/AIDS infection as we have today.

In an effort to communicate this effectively to our sisters and brothers, the following strategies should be considered:

- Increasing awareness at family level
- Integrating HIV/AIDS education in black dominated schools
- Partner with black groups that are tackling the high-risk factors such as drug-abuse, alcoholism, MSM and Sex trading.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is considered a killer in the global black community for a number of reasons. One of such is that since the history of the black race, there has always been marginalisation and second –class treatments. This has often resulted to sufferings, poverty and frustration at different levels. In an effort to get over these effects, many blacks take negative steps such as men resorting to the use drugs and alcohol, while the ladies take to exchanging sex for money and favor for economic survival.

Also at the family level, most black couples seem to prefer having sex partners outside their matrimonial homes when there is a problem, to putting heads together to proffer lasting solutions to such problems. This on its part affects not only the couples, but the children as well, who in some cases take to the streets in anger and frustration, thereby getting exposed to the risk factors.

All these put together expose blacks to most of the high-risk factors.

In approaching the issue of HIV/AIDS from the grass-roots, there will be need to address the risk factors as they affect regions and communities. For instance, within the African Sub-region, the factors for women include: poverty, illiteracy, religious beliefs and harmful traditional practices, gender inequalities, inadequate control of resources and weak laws against sexual harassment and violence, etc.

In order to achieve this, the following strategies should be considered:

- Partnering with local organizations that are addressing these factors to
 - Enhance awareness at various levels
 - Initiate Voluntary Counseling and Confidential Testing (VCCT) in schools and community health facilities
 - Involve Persons Living With HIV/AIDS and Persons Affected by HIV/AIDS in the efforts at tackling these problems
 - Provide counseling to men, women and youths on various social issues which have the chances of leading them into these risk factors
- Liaise with willing African Parliamentarians to sponsor bills that will help cut down on some of the factors such as:
 - Sexual harassment / violence and drug abuse.

- Harmful traditional practices and early marriage

A lot of work aimed at combating this deadly disease is going on in Nigeria. These are being put together by mostly NGOs and CBOs, though there is a National Body that has been charged with the responsibility. The body - National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA) sponsors some of these local organizations to carry out HIV/AIDS –related projects in various communities within Nigeria. Also, there is CISCGHAN, which is a coalition of Civil Society Groups working on HIV/AID. Majority of Nigerian NGOS and CBOs working on HIV/AIDS belong to this body.

There would be need for PFD to formally register with the body to enable her access to information on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, as well as to work in partnership with other member organizations in the body. This way, Partners can identify with existing efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.