

CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE 2020
Y+ BEAUTY PAGEANT CAMPAIGN



UNYPA
UGANDA NETWORK OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

THEME:
CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

TIME FRAME;
SEPTEMBER- NOVEMBER 2020



Introduction

In Uganda, HIV related stigma has been associated with emotional distress, decreased adherence to anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and reduced likelihood of HIV status disclosure. One argument for increasing access to ART has been that; doing so would reduce stigma through improvements in physical health and HIV-related symptom burden leading to economic rehabilitation and social reintegration.

In a country where 1.4 million people are living with HIV with an estimated 23,000 Ugandans dying of AIDS-related illnesses annually, the girls and young women in particular are disproportionately affected, there are many political and cultural barriers which have hindered effective HIV prevention programming in Uganda. As a result, new HIV infections are continuing to rise in the country. While there have been increased efforts to scale up treatment initiatives in Uganda there are still many people living with HIV who do not have access to the medicines they need. Punitive laws and stigmatising attitudes towards men who have sex with men, adolescents and young people, sex workers, and people who inject drugs has meant that these groups most vulnerable to infection are far less likely to engage with HIV services.

The COVID- 19 is a serious disease that hit countries and has increased the burden of HIV especially with older people, people with lung problems and people living with HIV may be at a higher risk of becoming infected with the virus and suffering more adverse symptoms. Recognizing the relatively weaker health- care systems, informal settlements, over- crowded refugee settlements, lack of clean water and sanitation, the current approaches to self- protection and social distancing need to be strengthened for them to be more effective.

Currently operational in 54 districts in Uganda, the organization has re- organized itself to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic especially for young people living with HIV/AIDS, we have reached out to the most marginalized and hard to reach communities in Uganda including in the proposed project areas in Kampala, Kwanja, Kamuli and Kabale







Background

According to the Stigma Index survey 2017 report of central Uganda, external forms of HIV-related stigma commonly experienced involved experiences of family members making discriminatory remarks 19%; verbal harassment 19%; physical harassment 9.5%; experiences of blackmail 12%; refusal of employment 6.7%; and loss of a source of income 10%. The rates of internal stigma were high 53% mentioned that it was still difficult to tell other people about their HIV status; 32% felt guilty that they had HIV, 26% were ashamed to have HIV; 22% mentioned that they experience feelings of worthlessness and 60% hid their HIV status from others.

Furthermore, for young people specifically, stigma has an intensified impact. The Stigma Index report highlights effects on ability to cope with stress, negotiate safe sex, and self-confidence. Additionally, an astounding 23% of YPLHIV report their HIV status affects their ability to find love. This intensely affects their uptake of HIV services at health facilities, adherence, fear to disclose due to violence and rejections like lack of family support during this critical development stage and exposes them to risky behavioural practices like sex work, drug use among others.

The COVID- 19 virus has worsened stigma towards people living with HIV/AIDS, the current pandemic threatens to reverse the accomplishments that have been made in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Uganda. As soon as the first case of COVID-19 was identified in Uganda on 19th March 2020, strict lockdown measures were enforced, including a ban on all public and private transport, night curfew, closure of schools, suspension of religious and social gatherings, and closure of non-essential shops and markets⁸. Firstly, these measures present barriers to HIV testing, in particular initiatives fortesting Uganda’s most vulnerable groups, including workplace testing, mobile mass testing campaigns and self-testing amongst fishermen, sex-workers and male partners of women attending antenatal care. For those with a new diagnosis of HIV, closures of clinics and the practicalities of leaving the house during lockdown prohibit essential linkage to care. However, a gravest concern has been the real possibility of substantial ART interruption. In Uganda, this is likely multifactorial: supply chain issues as borders are closed, the inability of people to leave their homes to obtain essential medications, and people relocating to villages away from their HIV clinics.

Additionally, there is the dire situation of poverty and hunger faced by many individuals, where mere survival rather than maintaining HIV care has become the priority. This disruption in ART access has very real consequences on those who were previously adherent to ART and virologically suppressed. Significant lapses in HIV virological suppression may result in increased community transmission of HIV in Uganda and other comparable settings, which would represent a catastrophic downstream effect of COVID- 19

Failing to recognise the potential impact of the current pandemic on the HIV care continuum in Uganda could result in a huge upsurge in HIV transmission and deaths in the months and years to come. In addition, increasing global travel, urbanization and changes in land use mean that future pandemics are almost inevitable. Substantial action must be taken now by HIV service providers, policy makers and the government to create innovative, sustainable and effective solutions to prevent us “stepping back in time” in HIV care and minimise the collateral damage of COVID-19 on the HIV care continuum.

The Y+ Beauty pageant is an annual campaign aimed at fighting stigma and discrimination as well as addressing the structural drivers of gender-based violence and other HIV/SRHR related issues against young people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Y+ represents Young people living with HIV. The Y+ Beauty Pageant addresses both self-stigma faced by YPLHIV and community stigma driven by the environment towards YPLHIV by uplifting their plight and harnessing the power of empowered YPLHIV in HIV activism. The Y+ Beauty Pageant Model has been tested since 2014 from 10 contestants and this number has increased over the 6 years to 855 youth advocates commonly referred to as the Y Plus ambassadors as of 2019. These have taken up the responsibility of fighting and discrimination in their different communities through different activities like school out reaches, peer to peer support groups, dialogues and representation on both national and international high-level meetings. In 2019, community engaging activities reached a great number of people in the communities; in the community dialogues, 400 [120 males, 360 females] parents, 60 [37 males, 23 Females] District leaders, 68 [21 males, 47 females] Health workers and 180 [97 males, 83 females] young people participated in the dialogues.



Activity description

UNYPA therefore, organises the 2020 Yplus beauty pageant for YPLHIV in order to re-echo their voices, co- create to build a strong, energetic, creative, and productive generation able to address the multiple dimensions in which stigma and discrimination affect young peoples through raising awareness and empowering Y+ Ambassadors both male & female as champions to challenge HIV related stigma, discrimination & gender based violence within their communities. Through its yearly cycle, the Y+ Beauty Pageant breeds a generation of YPLHIV youth advocates advocating for and working towards an HIV stigma-free Uganda. The campaign consists of three stages: regional auditions, a boot camp, and a grand finale.

The theme this year is,

“Changing The Narrative”

which seeks to transform the way in which YPLHIV are perceived by the communities from which they come and serve; it looks at projecting YPLHIV as agents of change, champions and ambassadors of meaningful youth engagement and participation to ensure that young people and adolescents living with HIV enjoy an inclusive access of sexual reproductive health rights services.

Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the dynamics of the 2020 Yplus beauty pageant campaign shall be differently conducted in line with the Ministry of Health SOPs shared in terms of the COVID-19 prevention and response

The objectives of the campaign will include;

- To empower YPLHIV as youth champions and advocates to speak out for their rights
- To create a safe space for YPLHIV to express themselves freely, share stories of change and build coalitions to fight stigma within their own communities.
- To promote inclusiveness of young people living with HIV including key populations in the design; implementation and monitoring of HIV related programs.
- To enhance a gender-transformative focus on empowering women, men, boys and girls; and strengthen their capacity to participate in and benefit from programs to reduce HIV related stigma and discrimination.
- To Improve peer to peer care and support within the health sector and home-based caregiving. This will be achieved through engagement of Y+ ambassadors who will continuous sensitize their host communities.
- To raise awareness about the COVID-19 pandemic, how it can be prevented and how PLHIV are affected by it as well as popularizing the guidelines

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Planned Activities

1. THE LAUNCH:

This shall be the unveiling of the Y Plus beauty pageant, it shall comprise a "press briefing" with journalists and partners to inform them about the Y+ beauty pageant 2020 as well as give them a chance to ask questions about the pageant to clarify its purpose as this is sometimes misunderstood by community members. However, this year we are planning to organize a press briefing conference with a few selected journalists, partners, the ambassadors to create a safe space for a conversation. The unveiling of the pageant also creates a platform for the Y Plus ambassadors to share their experiences and how the pageant has impacted their personal lives. The launch activity will also reveal the roadmap of the 3 months campaign including online activations, regional auditions, Boot camp, and lastly the grand finale.

The launch is proposed for **Friday 25th September 2020 from 1pm to 6pm.**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the launch shall have a total of only 30 people and shall be conducted as both a physical and online meeting to ensure that many people are involved within the campaign, short videos from the auditions shall be shared to show the journey of the pageant through the districts

2. REGIONAL AUDITIONS:

The regional auditions will comprise of young men & women between the ages of 15–24 openly living with HIV from partner organizations or health Centers in regions. This year's auditions will comprise of a series of activities like integrated community service events, community dialogues to build awareness of stigma and discrimination among community members for advocacy to put an end to all forms of gender-based violence as well as providing a conducive environment for survivors/victims of GBV to enable full disclosure and reporting of GBV cases as well as minimize social stigma;

Door to door approach will be used to disseminate messages for free HIV & SRHR together HIV testing and information. Radio talk shows will be conducted in these regions to raise awareness about the effects of HIV related stigma, GBV in line with the 16 days of activism and the international World AIDS day.

- **Central region- Wakiso - 7th and 8th October 2020**
- **Northern region- Kwanja - 16th- 17th October 2020**
- **Eastern region- Kamuli - 22nd- 23rd October 2020**
- **Western region – Kabale - 29th- 30th October 2020**

The auditions shall be held with consultation and guidance from the district COVID-19 response taskforce, in respect of the COVID-19 guidelines shared by MOH on social distancing, wearing of masks, washing hands, checking temperatures of all the participants, mobilization shall be done prior with the health facilities,



3. BOOT-CAMP:

The boot camp is a week-long capacity building and strengthening training conducted by external and internal trainers where the 18 (four contestants from each region) regional ambassadors camp together for capacity strengthening, empowerment and given resources they need to succeed through providing knowledge and skills on economic empowerment, key advocacy, life and hands on skills like talent breeding, bead work & crafts, Pad making and many more. This year's boot camp will be conducted on 13th- 19th November 2020.

The boot camp shall be held in respect of the COVID-19 guidelines on social distancing, wearing of masks, washing hands, checking temperatures of all the participants,



4. GRAND FINALE:

The Grand Finale will be conducted on Friday 20th November 2020.

The Grand Finale marks the climax of the 3 months' campaign; It will be an advocacy platform where stakeholders, decision makers, Partners and YPLHIV come together to witness and support the final contestants to go out and be the voices of their fellow young people living with HIV/AIDS and to front their key asks in relation to ending all forms of gender-based violence including provision and accessibility of SRHR and HIV services. Furthermore, the final contestants showcase their advocacy skills, knowledge on HIV/SRHR, and also share their action plans set out to fight gender-based violence and stigma and discrimination before a high-level jury and audience. 6 winners are selected (2nd and 1st runner ups, and Miss & Mr. Y+). This event also has sections for rewarding the most outstanding ambassadors for the year 2020/2021) that have done exceptional work in their community as champions and voices to end HIV related stigma & discrimination. From the grand finale, the finalists shall run an 12 months campaign on challenging HIV related stigma and discrimination within the communities from which they come with support of other young people in the district

The 2020 grand finale shall have a greater online and digital presence as it shall be aired on television and across the social media pages, it shall be held in respect of the COVID-19 guidelines on social distancing, wearing of masks, washing hands, checking temperatures of all the participants.





CONCLUSION

The Y+ Beauty Pageant campaign is the first of its kind in Africa and Uganda; the 3 months campaign this year is aimed at changing the narrative for YPLHIV, celebrating the works of Yplus ambassadors and the impact they have made in their communities, continue advocacy for creation of a safe and supportive environment for YPLHIV. The campaign shall challenge the negative gender and cultural norms which drive HIV related stigma and its adverse effects, while also strengthening capacity of YPLHIV to frontline the fight towards ending AIDS by 2030.

The 2020 Y Plus beauty pageant shall be different because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the campaign shall incorporate in information on the prevention of the virus, protection from the virus, as well as continued community engagement on challenging the myths and misconceptions surrounding HIV and COVID, the campaign shall be more virtual and digital to align to our current realities

We therefore seek for your support and partnership to make this event a success.

For more information, contact:

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