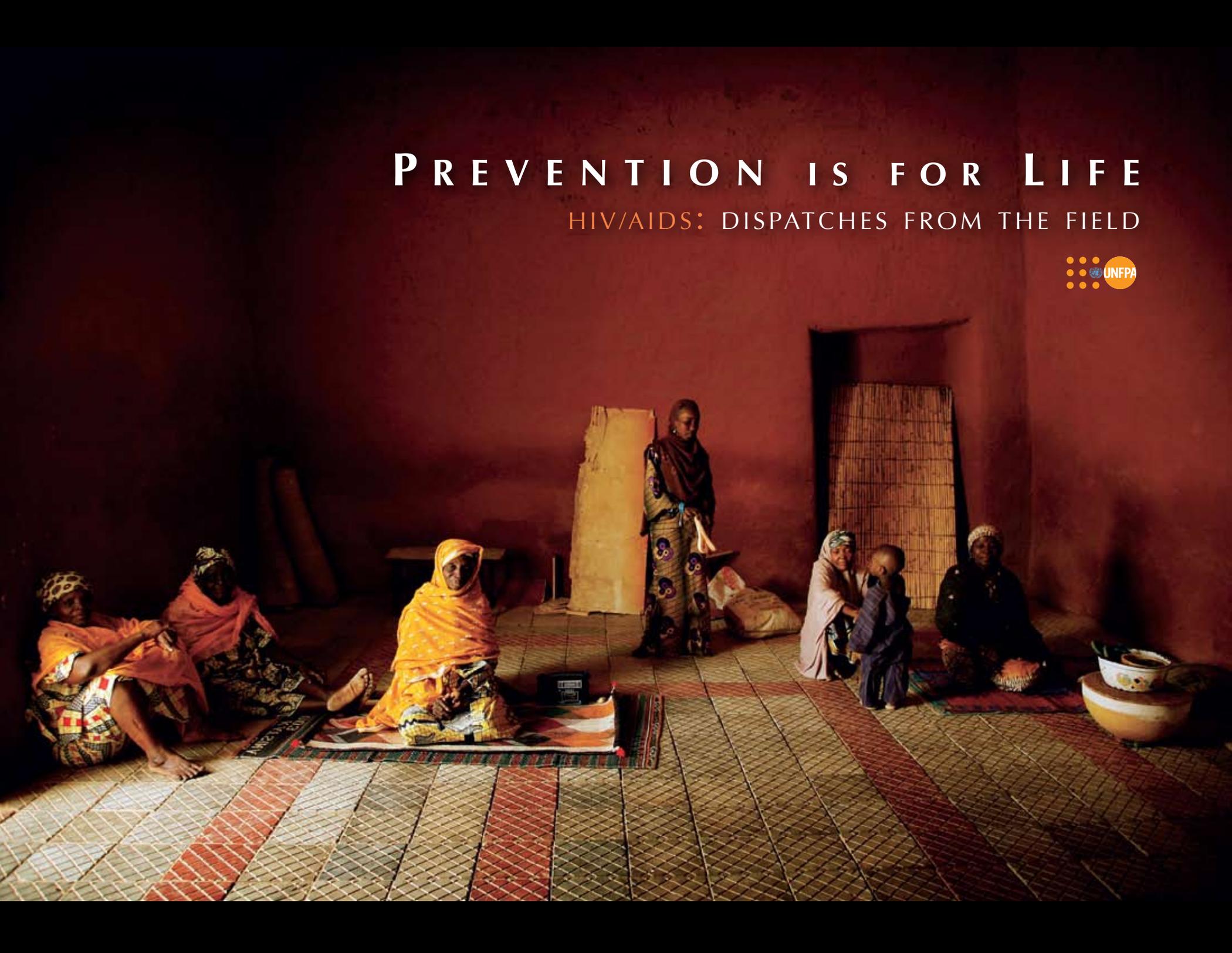


PREVENTION IS FOR LIFE

HIV/AIDS: DISPATCHES FROM THE FIELD



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Chris De Bode / UNFPA / Panos Pictures

Women and their infants, left and on cover, wait at a UNFPA-sponsored reproductive health care centre in Nigeria.



FOREWORD: A WORLD WITHOUT AIDS

Prevention works. And this booklet will tell you how, by providing real-life examples of how communities can make a difference and save lives. Since the HIV/AIDS epidemic erupted on the global health care scene in the early 1980s, researchers, health care workers, community leaders and activists, including those most at risk of acquiring HIV, have underscored the necessity of promoting the most cost-effective, rights-based, evidence-informed and rational intervention within the public health arsenal: prevention. In theory and in practise this means arming people with the information, counselling, services and commodities—such as male and female condoms—that will enable them to avoid acquiring HIV in the first place.

This is hardly a revolutionary concept, but it is one that has to be reaffirmed over and over as each new generation moves into their sexually-active and reproductive years and as the virus continues to make inroads into vulnerable populations such as women, migrants, young people and children.

Prevention is for life, and is life-long. As such, it requires a sustained and committed response. It means that UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donors, national governments and communities of people living with HIV and AIDS must work together to apply what works and to adapt these success stories to diverse cultural and geographical settings.

PREVENTION: A PUBLIC HEALTH MAINSTAY

Although HIV can strike anyone, it is not an equal opportunity virus. Gender inequality, poverty, lack of education and inadequate access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services continue to fuel the epidemic.

United Nations Member States have repeatedly reaffirmed that “HIV prevention be the mainstay of national, regional and international responses to the pandemic”. Comprehensive, rights-based and evidence-informed prevention, linked with access to effective sexual and reproductive health programmes and services, represent our best hope to halt the pandemic.

Nevertheless, despite a plethora of evidence that shows that behavioural change and comprehensive condom programming lowers transmission rates, prevention programmes tend to be under-funded, patchy or simply not available. In the hardest-hit, sub-Saharan African countries the average male has access to only ten condoms—per year.

Warrick Page / UNEPA / Panos Pictures
Adolescent girls and boys attend an HIV and reproductive health class at School Number One in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.



BUILDING ON OUR CORE STRENGTHS

As one of ten co-sponsors of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNFPA (the United Nations Population Fund) works to intensify and scale up HIV-prevention efforts by using rights-based and evidence-informed strategies in 154 countries worldwide.

UNFPA also promotes prevention activities by seeking to redress gender inequalities that fuel the epidemic. With more than three decades of experience dealing with gender relations and sexuality in different socio-cultural settings, UNFPA is uniquely qualified to strengthen the global response to HIV.

Within UNAIDS, UNFPA focuses its efforts on comprehensive male and female condom programming and HIV prevention, particularly among women and young people. UNFPA reaches out to the most at-risk populations, including indigenous communities, young people, women, migrants, sex workers and their clients. It supports sexual and reproductive health care that is tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable populations and those already living with HIV. UNFPA always seeks the participation of those it serves when it comes to shaping policies and programmes.

Linking HIV/AIDS with sexual and reproductive health remains the over-arching strategy of the UNFPA, and is key to bringing transmission rates down and reaching the goal of universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support.

DISPATCHES FROM THE FIELD

This booklet will detail how and why prevention works. By applying the principles of prevention to diverse populations around the world, the global community can help slow, and possibly halt, what is proving to be one of the greatest health challenges of our time.

Prevention services cost money, but HIV infection costs far more—in lost lives, ruined families and gutted communities. HIV and AIDS is currently rolling back decades of human development and is threatening to derail anti-poverty initiatives around the world. One averted HIV infection represents hundreds of thousands of dollars saved and a more secure future for generations to come.

PREVENTION WORKS: LET'S MAKE IT FOR LIFE. . . .

Warrick Page / UNFPA / Panos Pictures
A street vendor eyes an adolescent girl as she flits by in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.



CRITICAL MASS: YOUTH AND HIV

Youth is at the centre of the global AIDS epidemic; UNFPA actively involves them in programmes and policies that intimately affect them. And it works! Young people are a force for change when given opportunities to participate in programmes and in enabling environments that allow them to make informed choices about their lives and their future.

In its 2007 AIDS update, UNAIDS reported that from 2000 to the present HIV prevalence among young pregnant women (ages 15-24) attending antenatal care clinics declined in 11 out of the 15 most affected countries. In addition, preliminary data shows favourable changes in risk behaviour among young people in a number of countries (Cameroon, Chad, Haiti, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Togo, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe).¹

Researchers attribute the drop in numbers to behavioural change—e.g., delayed sexual debut, fewer partners and increased condom use, as well as improved surveillance methodology and reporting. Despite this promising trend, young people in other regions continue to be vulnerable—particularly young women who continue to bear the brunt of new infections owing to biological susceptibility, marginalization, discrimination and gender-based violence.

In order to be effective, prevention activities targeting all sectors of the population—and particularly young people—need to be consistent, long-term and include the direct input of the at-risk population. Indeed, youth participation can take many forms.

The UNFPA's commitment to youth participation is reflected in a wide range of initiatives—from peer education (Y-PEER) to advocacy, access to reproductive health care, voluntary testing and counselling. UNFPA also encourages young people to participate in the preparation of national and UN plans and other development frameworks.

These initiatives build on and utilize the skills, knowledge and enthusiasm of young people. Worldwide, UNFPA is training young people from all walks of life to raise awareness of the perils of unprotected sex, the impact of stigmatization and the importance of making responsible, informed choices about their sexuality and reproductive health.

Carolyn Drake / UNFPA / Panos Pictures

Young women preparing for beauty treatments at an aesthetics and hairdressing salon in Moscow, the Russian Federation.



REACHING OUT: HIV AND GANGS IN BELIZE

Belize City, BELIZE—Raymond Gentle, 32, is the owner of a convenience store on Belize City’s infamous South Side. His narrow glance, gold-capped teeth, tattoos and baseball cap tilted sideways suggest he’s not your average “mom and pop” business owner.

When asked about his role as a gang leader, he responds: “People say [I am]...the police say so.” But he does not fit the image of a Central American *marero*, or gang member, widely regarded as dangerous and unscrupulously violent. He is a father of two, and wants his kids to grow up with a chance at making an honest living.

ASSIGNED AT BIRTH

Gang membership on the South Side of Belize City is practically assigned at birth. There are no initiation rites for membership. If you live on Craw Road, chances are you will be a member of the Craw Road Gang.

Mr. Gentle is a gang leader who openly admits that members rob, steal and fight other gangs on the South Side; but, at the same time, he helps organize sports events for neighbourhood children as an alternative to “hanging out on the street and smoking weed”. He seems to understand that there is no excuse for illegal activities, and says he doesn’t want the next generation to “grow up like that”.

A BETTER FUTURE

Mr. Gentle also volunteers for Youth for the Future, an NGO, which forms part of a regional project to prevent HIV infection among vulnerable young people. Even though his attitude towards

the HIV prevention work is positive, not everybody welcomes the YFF volunteers.

HIGH PREVALENCE, HIGH POVERTY

Belize, a Caribbean nation of 270,000 inhabitants wedged between Mexico and Guatemala, has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the region. UNAIDS estimates that 2.5 per cent of Belizeans between 15 and 49 years of age are living with HIV. The Caribbean as a whole has the second highest HIV prevalence rate in the world—ranging between 1 to 1.2 per cent of the population, with Haiti at the upper end of the scale.² HIV prevalence is topped only by sub-Saharan Africa.

GROWING UP SCARED

“I was once hit in the head with a broken bottle,” recalls Douglas Hyde, an official with the Belizean Ministry of Youth and a coordinator of the Youth for the Future prevention programme. “Another time, someone pointed a gun to my head when I urged them to turn their life around and go back to school.” Several of the volunteers who were ex-gang members have been killed over the past number of years.

The OPEC Fund for International Development and UNFPA fund the “Prevention of HIV/AIDS Among Youth in Especially Difficult Circumstances” initiative. Working with gang members is only a small part of this project’s many activities, which are spread over six Central American and Caribbean countries (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras and St. Lucia, in addition to Belize). High-level political support for HIV prevention and mobilization of youth are just two of the project’s major achievements.

“Someone pointed a gun to my head when I urged them to turn their life around and go back to school.”

—Douglas Hyde,
Youth for the Future coordinator

Carina Wint / UNFPA

A young gang member shows off his tattoo in downtown Belize City. Gang violence in Belize is fuelled by the Latin American drug trade.



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A WIDE RANGE OF ACTORS

Activities in Belize involve a wide range of organizations, such as the 4H, the Cadet Corp (a type of correctional facility for males between the ages of 13 and 18), the United Belize Advocacy Movement and a community-based organization called the Cornerstone Foundation.

The Belize chapter of the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Organization), another participant, helps educate young women about HIV prevention and teaches them vocational skills to prepare them for adulthood.

CUTTING TO THE CHASE: BARBER SHOPS

Marleni Espinoza, 17, is among those who have benefitted. "I didn't get good grades in school, so I decided to learn about working in a beauty parlour," says Ms. Espinoza. She is taking part in a "barber shop" programme where participants learn how to protect themselves and their customers from HIV infection.

The Slip 'n Slide barber shop in Belize City is among participating salons. Its owner, Anthony Lofter, explains that he often talks to customers about HIV prevention and hands out condoms to some of them. The programme also offers shop owners free advertising as an incentive. Lofter says this has helped him increase his customer base.

HIV AWARENESS FOR ALL

San Ignacio seems far removed from Belize City's violent South Side, even though it is barely a couple of hours drive away. The small but bustling city located 10 kilometres (6.7 miles) from the Guatemalan border is an adventure tourism destination. It also serves as headquarters for the Cornerstone Foundation, which runs a variety of HIV-prevention programmes.



The OPEC Fund/UNFPA project has helped the Cornerstone Foundation print and distribute educational material for use in local schools. It also distributes HIV-prevention pamphlets and condoms to about 20 local hotels.

"About three or four years ago, it seemed that everyone here knew someone who was HIV positive. That is when we experienced an influx of requests for education," says Pamela VanDeusen, an international development consultant working for Cornerstone. "Now we need to reach a deeper level and end discrimination and stigma against those who are HIV positive."

Carina Wint / UNFPA
Anthony Lofter, above, owner of the Slip 'n Slide barber shop in Belize City, participates in an HIV-prevention programme. He frequently talks to his costumers about how to prevent getting infected.

Carina Wint / UNFPA

Youth for the Future is one of the programmes that receives funding from the OPEC Fund for International Development and UNFPA. Left, a programme coordinator with a former gang member now actively involved in HIV prevention and violence reduction programmes.