

UN Resident Co-ordinator

Urban Youth Project

Signing of Agreement Ceremony

February 21, 2003
Old Naledi Kgotla



UN System in Botswana

**Resident Agencies and Programmes:
UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNAIDS**

Non-Resident Funds, Programmes and Agencies:
UNESCO, ICAO, UNCTAD, WTO, WIPO, UNIDO, FAO, HABITAT, DESA, ODCCP, ILO, ECA, UNEP, WORLD BANK

Young people and children, Chiefs of Old Naledi, Broadhurst, and Bontleng areas, Village Development and Health Committee members, Councillors, Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Health, UN Heads of Agencies, Ass. Director Primary Health care, Government officials, Representatives from the Non-Governmental Organisations and Community Based Organisations.

Distinguished guests! Dear youth!

We are gathered today to witness the signing of an agreement between the Government of Botswana [Ministry of Health]), the UN Theme Group on HIV/IDS and the implementing partners of the Urban Youth Project. This is a day that we have all been looking forward to. Preliminary activities of the Urban Youth Project have been very involving, and indeed very participatory, and this has resulted in an in-depth understanding of the project, its goals and objectives.

As we may all be aware, the Urban Youth Project is co-ordinated by the Government of Botswana through the Family Health Division of the Ministry of Health, and supported by the *UN Theme group on HIV/AIDS*. But most importantly: The project is implemented by civil society. By Non-Governmental Organisations and Community Based Organisations. This is an important partnership, and one that re-affirms the long standing co-operation between Government, the United Nations and civil society intended to support ordinary people improve their livelihoods.

The objective of the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS is to ensure that there is a well coordinated UN response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Botswana, based on Botswana's needs and priority areas. This project is clearly related to such priority areas. One is the need for HIV/AIDS behaviour change interventions for young people, and the other is capacity building of NGOs and CBOs in order to better equip them with the skills to fight the epidemic.

I am delighted to see the progress that the Urban youth Project has made, and I would like to assure you that the UN Theme Group and the UN organisations fully support this project.

In recent years we have experienced some success in enabling an expanded response through the involvement of civil society at country level. It is therefore not by default that the Urban Youth Project is solely implemented by NGOs and CBOs, with Government taking a coordinating role.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Experience has proved, again and again, that working with NGOs and other community based organisations is the most important avenue to be taken to ensure meaningful involvement of the community at large. Most problems are socially and culturally engraved, and therefore can most meaningfully and effectively be dealt with at community level.

Those directly affected will of course address the issues with better understanding, simply because they live with the reality every day. The tendency of denial, and of distancing one-self from the problems, is simply not possible or acceptable. We must therefore seek for effective interventions and responses where people live their lives. And we must ensure the involvement of the community, because ownership of the problem and the community based initiatives taken to solve them is a prerequisite for change, for success.

Bagaetsho, ensuring that the civil society leads the fight is also a process of building the technical capacity of the NGOs and CBOs. Initial experiences for the Urban Youth Project reflects that implementing partners to begin with have limited technical capacity. It is a great challenge for the project to ensure continuous training. Capacity building at community level is the key to success in the fight against Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health issues in the community.

Ladies and gentlemen! Adolescents and youth have distinct sexual reproductive health needs that must be addressed appropriately. The Urban

Youth project intends to achieve precisely that by contributing towards improved sexual and reproductive health and safer sex among young people in urban areas. In so doing, the Urban Youth Project embraces the three basic components necessary to address the ASRH needs.

Firstly: *To create a supportive environment for youth* is very necessary to ensure effective implementation of services. I have been informed that rigorous advocacy and community mobilisation has been carried out to ensure ownership and support of the project at community level. That is a step in the right direction, and a necessary one. An environment that is supportive of the Adolescent Reproductive Health efforts also includes policies that are favourable to the provision and use of reproductive health, facilities that are accessible and user friendly to the youth. Social norms and cultural practices that promote positive youth reproductive health behaviour is also a requirement.

It is the responsibility of the implementing partners to reach out to their communities and their community leaders to ensure a supportive environment. Each and every one of us carry part of the responsibility to stem the tide and deal with these challenges.

Secondly: *To improved the reproductive health knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviours of youth.* Ideally, youth naturally develop the relevant knowledge and skills from an early age. However in recognition of the wide range of risks that influence young people's reproductive health, concrete educational programmes that focus on Adolescent reproductive health have to be put in place. In many instances young people have little access to information and are depending on their peers, who may be poorly informed.

The project will also address this need by engaging a strong peer education programme. It is the hope of the project that ASRH knowledge will be increased significantly among youth in the target areas.

Thirdly: *To increase the use of reproductive health services and programmes of youth* is another strategy that the Urban Youth Project will pursue. The Government's commitment to ensuring more access to services that are friendly to Youth shall be affirmed. Presently, youth encounter barriers to services in private and public settings. The challenges they are faced with include: inconvenient hours of operation, concerns about privacy and confidentiality, staff members attitudes and actions, including scolding and moralising, fear and embarrassment. The project shall collaborate with service providers at community level from both private and public service centres to ensure that the above mentioned problems are addressed.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Poverty has been identified as one of the principal factors contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS. A consensus is now emerging that poverty reduction is an important component in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Poverty compounds the vulnerability of young people to HIV infection. Youth who are poor have an increased risk of infection because they are more likely to be poor in general health, yield to pressure to exchange money and goods for sex, migrate to find work, thus increasing the chances of risk and a lack of hope for the future.

The project seeks to contribute positively towards poverty alleviation. This will be achieved through the income generation strategy, where young people will be trained in business skills and be supported and mentored to develop their own small businesses.

An important feature of this Urban Youth Project is the recognition of the diverse nature of the youth population. It focuses on the poor, and the livelihoods programme is but one piece of the puzzle. The project acknowledges the need for factual information, for education and for skills building. And it affirms the need for youth friendly services and health seeking behaviour.

And equally important: the project emphasises meaningful community and youth involvement; capacity building of the implementing partners; and meaningful partnerships of the different stakeholders.

It is on that note that I congratulate the *real owners* and implementing partners of the Urban Youth Project. And they are:

- YWCA
- BOFWA
- *Junior Achievement Botswana*
- *Scripture Union*
- *Sebagana se leele*
- *Thusang Theatre Group*
- *Maiteko Theatre Group*
- CEYOHO
- *Whola Gents*
- *Old Naledi Table Tennis Club*

I encourage you to implement the planned activities with the highest level of commitment possible.

This is a chance! Take it and make the most of it!

Work hard to change the direction of the epidemic in your community!

It starts with you, and it could end with you!

The UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS and the Government of Botswana will be here to provide you with the necessary support.

I wish you all the best, and I trust that you will adhere to the agreements that we are just about to sign.

- *PULA!*

