Girls On The Move: Empowering the Iwaya Community

Nigeria’s adolescent girls hold the key to the wellbeing of their families, neighborhoods and the nation. If given quality basic education and skills; critical knowledge and the capacity to protect their health; and the confidence and opportunity to grow and prosper, their contributions will be multiplied many fold. Unfortunately, many adolescent girls in Nigeria still live in conditions of abject poverty, suffer from multiple socio-economic deprivations, and thus remain exposed to risky sexual behaviour as a means of survival.

Following an action-oriented research conducted by Action Health Incorporated (AHI) to understand the realities, needs and concerns of adolescent girls in Lagos, a multi-dimensional empowerment project was launched in Iwaya, one of the numerous communities designated as blighted or slum areas by the Lagos State Urban Renewal Authority. In partnership with community members and relevant state government agencies including the Lagos State Agency for Mass Education, 108 out-of-school girls were identified to benefit from the pilot phase of this initiative, which has provided adolescent girls in Iwaya with the opportunity to enroll in various programme options that included formal education, non-formal education and vocational skills acquisition through apprenticeship with accredited artisans in the community. As told by themselves, these are the stories of some of the adolescent girls in Iwaya who participated in the empowerment initiative, and are now taking bold steps to improve their lives while contributing to the wellbeing of their families and neighborhoods.
"I had always dreamed about running my own hairdressing salon"

Damilola Kucheopon is 22 years old stylist and an indigene of Badagry, Lagos State. She attended Jibowu Junior High School and was attending Mainland Senior High School when she became pregnant at 19 and had to drop out of school. Damilola blames her misfortune on the norms and practices prevalent within her community, Iwaya. She explained that it was considered normal for young girls to have their boyfriends, even if they were much older, providing for their needs and those of their families. "It is seen as a sign of maturity" she said. The girls are also expected to reciprocate these gifts by granting the boyfriends sexual favours, which often results in unwanted pregnancies like it happened to her. Although Damilola's baby died subsequently, she said she did not go back to school because she didn't think she could deal with the shame and humiliation she knew would be awaiting her among the school administration and her classmates.

From then on, she began selling water as a way of contributing to her family's income. Fortunately, she was selected when the AHI team came to identify girls for the empowerment programme. Damilola said, "Some community members said all kinds of things about how they did not trust the scheme and even tried to discourage me and other girls who were selected from participating. They did not believe that anybody would be interested in helping drop-out girls like us." Many of the girls remained adamant and some even had to plead with their parents and guardians before they could gain their support to join the scheme. Damilola and some other girls from her neighborhood joined the programme to be trained as hair-stylists. "I had always dreamt about running my own hairdressing salon" she said. "This is two years after, I have learnt how to retouch, wash and set hair, as well as do Ghana-weaving, pedicure, manicure and lots more. The same community members are now saying they are happy for us; many of them even came for our graduation ceremony. I have a lot of plans for myself- I hope to have my own big shop and lots of apprentices in this coming year," she said. In addition, Damilola, acknowledged that she now understands the risk of having multiple partners and has learnt the importance of using protection and keeping herself safe from sexual abuse.

"I know education is important and my children must have it"

Bose Kujannayin is 20 years old. The third child in a family of five children, although she had been enrolled in the past, she was stopped from attending school in Primary 2 and started hawking fish to support her family. "I have always wanted to learn how to sew, so I was so happy when the empowerment opportunity came to my community," said Bose. She lamented over the efforts of her extended family members who had tried everything possible to convince her parents to give her and her sisters out for marriage, but her father refused. According to her, although he was unable to afford keeping them in school, he always wanted them to learn one trade or the other and grow up to be successful women. "He gave me every support to join the empowerment scheme when they were registering girls in my area"

Bose recalls, "When we were being taught about Sexually Transmitted Infections and HIV during one of the evening classes, I thanked God silently because I have never been the type that go around with different men. She enthused about how useful the opportunity had been for her, saying "The training they gave us has helped me set good goals for myself, and I now know what I want from my life. I know I don't want to rush into marriage and if marriage eventually comes, I want to have a proper court marriage. I have also learned to control my anger and stay out of trouble".

Bose shared how so many people in her community didn't initially believe in the programme, so they were all surprised when she and her colleagues graduated. Today, many of the community members are awaiting a similar programme to come their way again. Bose, who speaks proudly about how well she now sews, and how she has cultivated the habit of saving, says she wants to have 3 children in the future and she will make sure they all get formal education. "I know education is important and my children must have it" she said.
“I am proud to say that I am a tailor.”

Sandra Togbe, 15 years old and the ninth of her family’s ten children had never been to school. Her father, has other wives and her mother is a fish seller. When asked why she had never been enrolled in school, Sandra said, “My parents can’t afford to send me to school and like me, many young people in this community would also like to learn a trade. Unfortunately, many parents prefer that we go and hawk for the family. They are satisfied with the little money their children can bring back after selling every day.”

She recounted her experiences before her selection for the girls’ empowerment scheme. “When hawking fish for my mother, I would walk very far just to get 200 Naira”. She narrated how men would offer to pay more money for her wares, in exchange for sex. “They will ask me to come into their house, saying that they would give me 1,000 Naira for my fish, but I would refuse,” she said. “I know that I am too young and if I dare get pregnant, I can die during labour. All I wanted was to just learn a trade, not get pregnant.”

“Now I am proud to say that I am a tailor. I like my life and my body feels better. I do not have constant headaches like I used to, when I used to hawk. I am always busy at work, so those of my friends who used to come by my house so that we could go and visit boys together no longer find me at home. Some people tried to discourage my mother from allowing me to learn this trade, but she didn’t listen to them. Now I make my own money and support our family better. I even sew for my other brothers and sisters. I am also learning to read and write from the evening classes I attend three times a week after we close from work at my training place”.

“I am proud to say that I am a tailor.”

Damilola Ayivoji is from a family of 12 children and her father has four wives. Damilola narrated how much happier she has become since she enrolled at Premier Foundation Primary School. According to her, she had always wished she could attend school like some of her peers but never had the opportunity, because her parents couldn’t afford it. She said that the level of poverty in her family was so unbearable that one of her sisters once ran away from home to another man’s house. With a very bright smile, Damilola spoke about how her life has changed since she started attending school, “I am always so busy studying, especially solving mathematics problems, and everyone around my area complements me about my good behavior. I am so grateful for this opportunity that is helping my family. They enrolled my younger sister and I in school.” Damilola, whose best subject is basic science, says that once she completes primary school she would like to go on to Jibowu High School and then attend the University of Lagos which is a short walking distance from Iwaya community. She aspires to get a degree in medicine and eventually builds a hospital in her community and help save lives.

“When I got my report card for our last exam, and I saw that I came third overall, I ran to my mother’s shop to tell her. She was so happy and she bought popcorn for me to celebrate my passing well in school.” Damilola condemns the exclusion of girls from education and says, “Everyone should be allowed to go to school, so long as the person is willing to study.” She burst into tears as she recalled how one of her friends who was forced to get married died during childbirth, and said she wished that parents would just stop giving out their children when they are still so young.
"I and my parents have agreed that I will complete schooling before marriage"

Deborah Achou is 14 years old and in primary school. Before she was identified for enrollment on the out-of-school girls’ empowerment programme, Deborah’s daily routine centered on assisting her mother with her petty trade and hawking fish around her neighborhood in Iwaya to support her family. She said, “I started selling fish from when I was very young. It is part of what I have to do to help my parents. I believe that it is what you do to your parents that your children will also do to you.” She is one of the more fortunate young girls in her community whose parents haven’t given out, in marriage to an older man with enough money to contribute towards the family’s expenses.

Although she is now enrolled in school, she still does the house chores assigned to her before she sets out every day. “I just have to make sure I wake up very early to do my work, and help my mother before I go to school.” According to her, she cannot use going to school as an excuse not to help her parents with share of the housework.

“This empowerment programme came just to protect girls like me - who want to go to school but our parents don’t have the money. It is saving us from the hands of wicked men. It is saving us from the hands of wicked men. They will not send us to school, but they want us to come and sit in their house and have children for them” she said.

"Now I can read and write, and when I attend to customers in my mother’s shop, I can speak English with them, not like before when I will always have to look for someone to help me interpret what the customer is saying anytime I had to sell anything to them. I also help my mother read messages sent to her mobile phone and write letters she wants to send to people in our hometown- this always makes her very happy”

Deborah herself is quite pleased about the turn of events in her family especially because any talk about her getting married is not on their agenda. “I and my parents have agreed that I will complete schooling before marriage. I know that I want to be a lawyer and I am going to do everything I can do to complete my education.”

“Nobody believed that I could be change this much...”

Beatrice Gandeh is 18 years old and she shared how she used to be so rebellious and did whatever she wanted to without minding the consequenc-
“I know I will become a medical doctor someday.”

Sandra Agenge is 16 years old and was born in a village not too far from Badagry. She recalls that her parents relocated to Lagos with herself and her other four siblings when she was eight years old. “I had since waited for the day I would put on a uniform to go to school like some of other girls”. Unfortunately, the dire circumstances of her family’s poverty made it unviable for her to accept the option of schooling provided on the empowerment scheme. Rather, she had to clinch the option of attending vocational trainings offered to the older girls.

“I am so glad I was able to join the scheme. I have been able take myself from my harsh life situation and I am now doing something better with my time. I didn’t always look this fine- I used to be so untidy. But after I was selected to train as a hairstylist and from attending the personal hygiene classes, I have noticed that I am looking very different…. When I look at myself in the mirror, I am happy with who I see.”

“I wake up early every day to help with the housework before getting ready to go to work at the hairdressing salon where I am registered. I really like the place and my boss is very understanding. I work very hard too and never miss the evening classes three times a week after school.”

Sandra, says she hates being idle and is always looking to be involved in ventures that that keep her busy, “...as an idle mind is where the devil will build a very big house.” When asked about her plans for the future, she said, “I have not stopped trusting God for the opportunity to go to school. I still have faith and I’m working hard with my present hairstylist training– but I know I will become a medical doctor someday.”

Lessons from Iwaya are a call for action

As the girls on the Iwaya programme move towards improvements in their life trajectories, so much remains to be done for girls in similar poorly resourced communities by all stakeholders—government and the private sector. Although the patterns seen in communities such as Iwaya are magnified by the grinding poverty and dense population, they are not unique to slum areas and are of national relevance. Thus the lessons AHI and our partners are learning from this initiative to support girls in the three primary, interconnected dimensions of their lives—personal, social and economic empowerment—are of relevance not only for Iwaya and other slum communities, but for Nigeria as a whole.
Poems

**Against Her Wish**

She came into the world to succeed  
Get a good education  
And live a fulfilled life  
Excellence was what she wished for  

Fate put her in a community  
Where her dreams were shortened  
Her dreams became nightmares  
What can she do now than to conform to the culture?  

When she thought all hope was gone  
Her nightmares became amazing smiles  
She could go for what she dreamt of  

What could she have done?  
But for that little mighty chance  
She found herself in the middle of ecstasy  
That chance is empowerment  
She can now live a fulfilled life.  

*John Oyadougha, 19 years (male)*

**Females Count!**

It has been from the beginning of time  
And lingered through many ages past /An abnormal exclusion has it been  
But these days give a chance as we’ve seen  

Discriminating against the female human species,  
Nullifying their dreams and wannabes  
Is nothing but a loss to nature  
As it lacks their outputs as creatures  

Empower a man, you have empowered his family  
Empower a woman, you have empowered the nation  
So they would achieve more in more than a few places  
Working with smiles in winsome radiances  

This is what people need to understand simply  
Every individual counts under the clear blue sky  
In every way, we all have things to offer  
If we can take the leap, we’ll be better.

*Noutouglo Ayodele, 19 years (male)*

**“Gender Equality; Girl Power”**

Growing up, I felt intimidated  
Never for once was I celebrated  
All the boys, they got preferential treatment  
Even at home, it wasn’t any different  

We lived our lives in inferiority  
Never believing in our capability  
Some of us felt this abnormality  
Others simply thought it was just part of humanity  

Now I can tell because I’ve learnt  
Empowerment is the only weapon we possess  
Success abounds but you need to search  
Education is your one sure guide  

*Kunmilade Adedokun, 18 years (female)*

**The “She”**

She walks with confidence  
And works with determination  
She uses the gifts of her hands  
In acquiring wealth for the land  

She becomes equipped with skills  
And intelligent in brains  
Shattered she becomes  
At the cruel hands of culture  

Oh! She sighs.....  
At the bliss of marriage  
The stands at the edge  
Longing to leave lest she perishes  

A smile on her face  
From overcoming the maze  
She now knows to be true  
It all begins and ends with you.

*Elizabeth Williams, 18 years, Female*
Sunday 17th November, 2013

One of the major announcements in church today was that Christmas Carol rehearsals would be starting next week Sunday and dancers should come with their rehearsal clothes. Oh well, Dear Diary, I am yet to decide whether or not I should join the expression members this year again considering the fact that I almost broke my legs last year... whoops! To be a dancer is not easy o...Khadijat dey try!

Ehnehn, by the time I rushed back to the sitting room yesterday, Aunty Kike was the August visitor in November – she decided to come and visit us since the tussle between ASUU and FGN is still on. She went with me to visit my mentor, Fumbi and even started thinking of enrolling as one of her apprentices.

Monday 18th November, 2013

Up 6am, I double checked my assignments and made sure they were all done. The weekend had been a long one for me and I must say, I had so much fun.

The assembly was just too long today, it was obvious everyone was tired of the principal’s long speech. Even on the teacher’s faces, one could tell. He finally said the saying with which he usually ends his speech, “Remember students...[everyone screamed] Senior School is Serious business”. And we all marched to our classes.

During recess, Khadijat informed Tammy and I that her elder sister was getting married in two weeks. Surprised as we were, we tried not to show it as this was the custom in Khadijat’s family and we didn’t want to go over the long talks of what is right and what is not... For all we know, Khadijat was tired of hearing that there was little or even nothing she could do to change her parents belief about child marriage. Tammy and I just nodded and promised to be there.

By the way, Dear Diary Ozomma wasn’t in school today.

Tuesday 19th November, 2013

Someone fainted on the assembly ground today and was rushed to the sick bay, and everyone was asked to march to their various classes almost immediately. We were all happy, because whoever fainted saved us from the principal’s long and boring sermon today. It was not until close of school that Tammy and I found out that Ozomma was the one who fainted. We rushed to the sick bay immediately and helped her home.

Aunty Kike asked why I got home late today but I just told her that I had extra classes and walked straight to my room. Dear Diary, Ozomma, my friend is p.ppr...pregnant! Sincerely, this is between me and you and well, Tammy of course. Even Khadijat doesn’t know yet and I honestly do not intend to tell anyone in this house, not even Aunty Kike. Please, keep this a secret for me...sighs! Goodnight.

Wednesday 20th November, 2013

Didn’t have dinner yesterday, so I woke up hungry and tired. I simply dragged myself to the bathroom and got myself prepared for school before dad ends up leaving me and then I have to go and board the bus. But that was what happened in the end as mum told me while serving me breakfast that dad didn’t come home from work last night because he has an early morning meeting today. Instead, he just lodged in a hotel around his office. The look on my face when I heard this was like “WHHAAAAATTT!!!”

Mr. Tikola is first period on Wednesdays, so I couldn’t afford to be late to his class. His punishment would leave my body useless for the rest of the week. I ran to the bus stop and prayed for a miracle. Oh Dear Diary, while struggling to enter the only bus which came after 20 minutes of waiting at the bus stop, I noticed that someone had stepped on a pregnant teenage girl. She sat on the ground crying, I could feel it, that she was in pain. I felt a cold shiver down my spine as I watched her and I didn’t know when I jumped down from the bus to help her stand up and pack her scattered things into her bag. She must have been going for her antenatal as I watched her and I didn’t know when I jumped down from the bus to help her stand up and pack her scattered things into her bag. She must have been going for her antenatal as I saw her hospital card in her bag too. I later helped her to get on another bus and even paid her t-fare. I had shared my lunch money with her by paying her t-fare but I was less concerned, all that filled my thoughts was Ozomma, very soon she would be this heavy too and then she would have to stop school to attend antenatal instead and that bigheaded Ibo trader boyfriend of hers? What is he even doing about this issue?
“Ozomma, you are getting fat o!” Abeke, the tatafo mistress in her class said that to her this morning. Ozomma told us during recess. That girl is evil, she sees the “unseeable” and hears the “unhearable”. Ozomma, Tammy and I sat to discuss the way forward in one of the old buildings in our school. Ozomma voiced her opinion, “I don’t want to keep the baby”. Tammy and I looked at each other and then at her. Deep down, we also didn’t want her to keep it, because we didn’t want to loose our friend to teenage motherhood and worst of all we didn’t know a thing about abortion – Won’t she die?

On my way home from school today. I thought about how the week had gone, and couldn’t believe it was weekend already. I thought about how Ozomma had fainted on the assembly ground and she had lied to the old and lazy nurse that she had a headache, and she had joyfully given her paracetamol - that’s all she gives, even when you are purging.

I thought about how Ozomma’s aunt who she lived with ever since the death of her parents would react when she found out about Ozomma’s pregnancy. It was her aunt’s fault anyway, she doesn’t provide for her niece and leaves Ozomma without any choice other than to depend on her trader boyfriend. And now, the end result… PREGNANCY.

The three of us parted ways today to go and gather information on what to do about this issue on ground. Dear Diary, should I talk to mum or Aunty Kike or both of them?

It’s another pap and akara day. I did a little painting today with the little materials I have. Dad promised to get me the rest by the end of the month. It’s close, so I am not bothered.

I later joined Mum and Aunty Kike in the sitting room to watch a movie that was being shown on Africa Magic. The movie was about a young girl who got pregnant in the secondary school and decided to get an abortion after much persuasion from her boyfriend, but unfortunately died. She had gone to a quack doctor and had died a few minutes after getting home because she couldn’t stop bleeding. This movie scared me so much. I didn’t even know when I shouted “she is not going to do it!”. It was when Aunty Kike and Mum chorused “Do what?” that I knew I had thought aloud. I just said nothing and hurried to my room.

I joined the choristers today. I already know the songs they have chosen to sing for this year’s Carol, so less work for me.

We had to let Khadijat know about Ozomma’s pregnancy today. She discovered we were hiding something from her and started withdrawing from us. Ozomma suggested we let her know, since she is one of us. Surprisingly, Khadijat knew what Ozomma could drink that would flush the growing “zygote” away. She however said she would bring it to school as soon as she is able to lay her hands on it. Her sister keeps it in her wardrobe and unless she is able to lay her hands on the keys, she won’t be able to get it. Since we all agreed that we didn’t want anyone to know, my initial suggestion of talking to the school counsellor was shut out.

“For fertilization to take place, sexual intercourse must occur in order for the semen to be ejaculated and then swim to fuse with ovum. Millions of sperms are released at the point of ejaculation and when ejected they swim towards the female egg with their thread-like tail. After a long journey, many of the sperm would have died out in their efforts to reach the egg, though some still have the potential to fertilize it. Each will attach itself to the ovum but only one would succeed in penetrating it. When these happen, fertilization has taken place and pregnancy has occurred”. These were the words of Mrs. Nkem during biology class today. How I wish all the sperms died on their way to Ozomma’s egg or they even missed their way…

At the close of school, Khadijat explained to us that she hasn’t been able to lay her hands on the keys yet… We all left depressed, hoping for better news tomorrow…
A jegunle, a densely populated and under-resourced neighbourhood within the city of Lagos, is home to about 300,000 Ilaje and Yoruba speaking people of South Western Nigeria, many of whom are engaged in low-income employment and trades. This community has a primary health care centre that is not functional, as well as primary and secondary schools that were closed down because of flooding. The students were moved to another school compound, which is about 10 minutes away from the community by bus ride and about 30 minutes away by foot.

While on a visit to this community for the first time in September 2012, I noticed that many teenagers (girls, and boys) were not in school. I also learnt that the rate of teenage pregnancy, school dropout and illiteracy amongst the teenage girls of this community.

Specifically, some of the major problems we identified were:

- **There is a dearth of adequate facilities combined with a poor learning environment.** In particular, the students have to share one school compound with another school, and as a result the classrooms are always overcrowded. Consequently, concentration in class becomes increasingly difficult for the students.

- **Most of these girls are from very poor homes, with parents and guardians who are barely able to feed them.** The burden of catering for the needs of their family quickly fall on them as soon as they reach puberty – they start hawking or become sex workers, in order to fulfil this responsibility. Taking care of their family from such a young age doesn’t tend to go well with their education, they soon realize they have to forfeit one for the other. Unfortunately, their education always seems like a fair trade.

- **Many girls who live in the slums have no positive role model to look up to.** To the best of their knowledge, no girl from their community has graduated from university so there is really no one to motivate them to pursue their education.

- **Some of the young girls revealed that their mothers often discourage them about taking education too seriously by telling them, “No man wants to marry a woman who is too educated or intelligent.”**

Along with other intervention methods, the project introduced the “Meet a Shero” segment. Using technology and computer softwares like skype and google hangouts, we introduced participants to Sheros the world over who have gotten education at all cost and are influencing their communities positively.

Since this project began, we have successfully secured scholarships for: six (6) Sheros through Junior and Senior secondary school and three (3) Sheros through any federal university of their choice. In addition, we have linked over 7 of our Sheros with caterers, actresses, and hairdressers who agreed to take them on as interns.

In the 15 months since I began working with this community, I have seen these young girls transform into confident, resilient and determined young women. They have truly become Sheros; champions of change and advocates for the education of the girl-child within their community.
November 9th 2013, was the grand finale of the annual Teenage Festival of Life, popularly known as TFL by young people in the public secondary schools around Lagos. Action Health Incorporated (AHI) has organized TFL over the last 20 years and it has grown to become a keenly anticipated event that celebrates the creativity of young people while providing a platform to speak about the sexuality issues, and other challenges youth face in Nigeria today. Based on the selected theme, young people share their perspectives using the medium of the creative arts - drama, poetry, music and essay writing. The theme for 2013 TFL was "The Media and Promotion of Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health," and it explored issues on access, opportunities, challenges and media safety.

This year’s host was young and ebullient Chude Jideonwo, an award-winning journalist, leading expert on new/social media and youth lifestyles, and a media entrepreneur. Chude is the Founder and Managing Partner of Red Media Group. He is also a writer and public speaker known for a string of nationally viral speeches and for motivating young people around the world to take action on their own behalf. His life and work has centered on creating opportunities for young Nigerians and using the media as a proactive tool for positive social action. In line with the 2013 theme on the media, AHI was excited to have him volunteer to serve as a facilitator during the preparatory stages and then as host at the grand finale.

Chude talked about the types of media accessible to young people today: TV, radio, magazines, Facebook, Twitter, etc as well as mobile applications like WhatsApp and 2go. He highlighted how the media continues to be the most formidable tool that young people have today to exercise their power as catalysts for change. He also opened up the stage for questions from young people in the audience.
Dayo D1

5 Things You Need To Succeed

1. Get an education: Education is very important. You may already know that King Sunny Ade, the renowned Juju musician, who has been classified as the most influential musician of all time, taught himself to read and write. Otunba Ganiyu Adams, the national leader of the Oodua People’s Congress (OPC) also went back to school at the age of 40. Ganiyu has been quoted as saying that “…going back to school gave him the confidence to talk among my peers”.

2. Have a game plan: No one is too young to have a plan, find something you are passionate about and set achievable goals. If you are a carpenter, be a good carpenter. Parents also need to approach their children with an open mind and support them in their chosen fields.

3. Be an Optimist: Do you know that President John F. Kennedy in the USA, challenged his nation to put a man on the moon and return him safely to the earth before the end of the 1960s? On the 20th of July, 1969, Neil Armstrong landed on the moon. Do not hang around people who speak negatively about everything and never see possibilities. Even here in Nigeria, with all the difficulties, we have numerous examples of people who have carved niches for themselves because of their “can do” spirit—people like Alhaji Aliko Dangote, the richest man in Africa, Dr. Mike Adenuga, and Dbanj are household names whose stories speak of what can happen if we set our minds on the possibilities.

4. Be prepared to work smart: Working smart means leveraging the resources and connections around you. At no time more than today has there been so many resources and connections available for people to tap into especially because of the advances in information and communications technology. I recall the occasion when I first shook hands with Ben Murray Bruce and asked how come his hands are so soft and supple. His reply was, “I don’t do much, I just sell ideas.”

5. Choose your friends carefully: Friendships can make or mar you. I will always give you the example of my longtime friend and business partner, Kenny Ogungbe - our relationship has impacted my life positively. I really encourage you to choose your friends wisely because one’s friends can greatly influence whether one will be successful or not.
Mr. Dayo Israel is an astute motivational speaker and adviser to leaders, business executives, and politicians. He also has twelve years of work experience in international development with the United Nations. Mr. Israel spoke on ‘media accessibility,’ saying that many media platforms such as Facebook and smartphone applications are available to young people. He mentioned the many Facebook accounts and BlackBerry phones with thousands of contacts he has, and how he has used these for marketing and earning money. He even shared that he earns about 100 pounds on every BlackBerry broadcast he sends.

Mr. Shola Edu is an animator, a graphic designer and a blogger. He is the CEO of Deluxe Creations Studio. Mr. Edu shared his experience of how he learnt about animations and blogging via the internet, using YouTube. He explained that one does not need a computer to access these platforms, as they are very much available on smartphones and even java phones.

Samuel Isichie is a British Council/World Bank development knowledge facilitator, and he enlightened the audience on using podcasts. He enlightened that podcasting is done when mobile phones are used to record MP3s. He added that he has used podcasts to promote his own course creatively. He said that young people could create their own news, record it and send it to TV stations or even publish it on the internet.

Stephen Oguntoyinbo is the CEO of Top Village International and a Resource facilitator. He was also a Peer Educator in AHI during his high school days. Stephen informed young people about the challenges and dangers of using the social media wrongly. He advised young people not to post just any picture on Facebook, especially the ones that can tarnish their identity. He also told them to be mindful of the kind of information they access and provide on the various social media platforms available today. He spoke about the numerous opportunities social media provides, like taking courses online, searching for schools abroad and various self-development prospects that abound all over the world.

Following the discussion segment, there were three presentations each in drama, music, and poetry. Long before the presentations at the grand finale, script-writing workshops were held for 291 secondary schools from the six Education Districts in Lagos State on the event’s theme and concept. After three months, the participating schools submitted their scripts, which were scored and selected for presentations following a series of selection processes. At the end of the entertaining and educating presentations, the contestants who won the first through third positions were awarded trophies, while those in the fourth to sixth positions were presented with recognition plaques. The schools awarded included:
The winning schools were no doubt excited as the audience went agog with thundering applauses and chants as the results were announced. The best male and female performers, were also awarded prizes. The coordinating teachers too were not left out—they received appreciation handshakes and small gift items for their selfless commitment and support for the students as they prepared for participation in the various competition stages.

Other high points were performances from the popular and vibrant artiste Omolayo Wale—one of the well-loved contestants in the recently concluded MTN Project Fame. He mesmerized the crowd at TFL with his warm personality and beautiful voice as he performed a solo ballet dance to a soft and moving song by Celine Dion. During his second appearance on stage, he performed his own solo (composed with the theme of TFL 2013 as further edutainment for the youth audience) and a ‘WhizKid’ song called ‘Omo Jaiye Jaiye’ to the thrill of the audience. His ‘Omo Jaiye Jaiye’ performance was supported with hip-pop dance from the ‘SLYD’ dance group. In all, almost 2,000 young people and adults from around Lagos attended the event. There were also representatives from six media houses, including TV and radio stations.

The event ended with a vote of thanks to schools that submitted entries for the various competition categories, youth members on the TFL Planning Committee and everyone one in attendance at the grand finale. As it’s always the case, many folks are already eagerly looking forward to an even better and star-studded TFL 2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>First Position</th>
<th>Second Position</th>
<th>Third Position</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>Tomia Comprehensive Senior Secondary School, Alagbado</td>
<td>Angus Memorial Senior High School</td>
<td>Jagunmolu Girls’ Senior Grammar School, Bariga</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Girls Senior High School, Agege</td>
<td>Ikosi Senior High School, Ketu</td>
<td>Lagos State Civil Service Junior Model College, Igbogbo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Ikosi Senior High School, Ketu</td>
<td>Arch Deacon Adelaja Senior High School, Bariga</td>
<td>Tomia Senior Secondary School, Alagbado</td>
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<td>Essay</td>
<td>Egan Senior Grammar School, Egan</td>
<td>Ideal Girls’ Senior High School, Surulere</td>
<td>Idi – Araba Senior High School, Mushin</td>
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SO, WHY DON’T YOU WANT TO GO OUT WITH DAPO?

I AM NOT PREPARED FOR A RELATIONSHIP NOW.

NONSENSE. YOU SIMPLY DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU’RE MISSING, NGOZI.

DAPO IS NOT ONLY HANDSOME, HE’S ALSO A 100M AND 400M ATHLETICS CHAMPION

I KNOW. AND THAT’S EXACTLY WHY I DON’T WANT TO GO OUT WITH HIM.

WHY?

I DON’T WANT HIM TO DO TO ME WHAT HE DID TO LOLA.

?!?

AFTER HE IMPREGNATED HER, HE DID WHAT HE KNOWS BEST—HE TOOK TO HIS HEELS.

D.D. ONU
The renowned Nigerian actress, producer and director has received several nominations and awards for her work, including multiple African Movie Academy Awards. She graciously granted Growing Up an interview about the educational qualifications, skills and qualities required for a professional career in acting.

What does your job entail?

As an actor, I portray characters on stage, on radio and in television shows/ movies. The job entails reading scripts, auditioning in front of directors and producers, researching the designated character’s personal traits and circumstances to better portray them to the audience, and performing the role following the director's directions.

In addition to acting, I produce plays, primarily for the theatre, even though I’ve produced for the movies and radio too. I also direct stage plays for theatre and as a director, one is responsible for the creative decisions of a production; selecting cast members, directing the work of the cast and crew, as well as working with the actors to help them portray their characters better during rehearsal.

Beyond acting and directing, I train corporate organizations on using acting skills to enhance corporate skills and I run a school called the Lufodo Academy of Performing Arts, where young people are trained in the basics of acting.

What is your typical day’s schedule like?

I wake up early to say my prayers. Then I have coffee and water, take my bath and get ready for the day. On a day I have to go for a theatre rehearsal, I get to the venue early enough and sit in the car to read my script and go over my lines, so that when I’m called on stage to play my part, I can give the best possible delivery. When I’m done in the theatre for the day, I go straight home to respond to my mails, meet with my son who runs the family’s company and attend to any other business there is, before I go to bed. More often than not, an actor’s work hours are long and irregular; typically, my routine includes evening, weekend and public holiday work. For those of us who work in theatre, a lot of travel is involved especially, when you have a touring show across the country and as an actor in movies, there’s also the travel to work on location.
What qualification/skills/qualities does one need to be an actor?

To succeed in acting, you need to get formal education and the minimum requirement is a secondary school ordinary level certificate. Even though a university degree is not a pre-requisite, you should attend if you have the opportunity – today, many actors have a bachelor’s degree. In the university, you also do not have to study theatre arts, you can always enroll in an acting school or academy to get the training required. In my case, I trained to be an actor; I didn’t just walk into it. You need training to understand the skills necessary for stage, camera, and even radio. And because this is a practice-based industry, it takes many years of practice to develop the skills required to be successful, so you find many actors continuing to train through workshops or mentoring by a drama coach.

As for the qualities and skills required, a very strong sense of discipline is one of the qualities a good actor must possess- for instance, I always ensure that I get to the set punctually. You also need creativity to interpret and portray the characters’ feelings and motives in the most believable way; memorization skills to learn and recall your lines flawlessly; and speaking skills to say your lines clearly, project your voice, and pronounce words so that the audience understands them.

How did you start in this career?

I started out acting after completing my A-levels and had a gap year. A lot of things happened to me during that gap year that changed my life. I wasn’t sitting at home idle, I worked with the University of Lagos Cultural Troupe, I worked with the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) as an actor, worked on radio as an actor too and also with the National Theatre as an actor. I worked with top people in the industry, getting to see the various areas of the industry before I travelled to England. I went to England to get a diploma in dramatic arts, majoring in acting. Then I came back home and started working on two series at the same time - Mirror In The Sun and Second Chance- acting as different characters on both series.

What do you find difficult about your work?

It can be quite tasking. I just came into Lagos from a production in Abuja where there was a particular day we rehearsed all night into the day of the performance - from three o’clock in the morning till 10 o’clock at night when the show ended. There are also times I have gone from a stage performance straight to a movie set. I went to a movie location from a stage performance one day and was there from 11pm till 8am the following morning.

Your schedule is also not your own and your social life may have to be kept on hold as a result of the job’s demand on your time- this is one of the occupational hazards.

What do you find exciting about your work?

I find everything about my work exciting! I love delving into and tearing a script to pieces; getting to know the character, finding out the various layers that make up a character and generally understanding the character. This, for me, is very exciting and nothing is more fulfilling than enjoying what you do and getting paid for it.

What’s the greatest perk about working in this profession?

There are so many perks, I was in Abuja recently for a stage play called Jiji, and I went to the supermarket to get a couple of items and then someone goes “...wait a minute, is that not Joke Silva?” And another person whom I also did not know answers, “Oh yeah, she’s here for Jiji, haven’t you seen the posters all around.” And do you know, she went ahead and bought me a bottle of champagne? At other times, I have been at the airport, already paid for an economy class ticket and then I get on the plane and they’ll say, “No way, we have a space for you in the business class cabin!” There are so many favours people grant those of us in the performing arts, in admiration of the roles we’ve played over the years.”
Your Questions Answered

5 Things You Should Know About HIV and AIDS

You may already know that young people are greatly affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and in Nigeria, young women carry a staggering proportion of the burden of HIV. HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, a virus that attacks and weakens the body’s immune system, allowing infections to develop. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. All persons living with AIDS are infected with HIV, but not all persons with HIV infection have AIDS. AIDS is only the end stage of this infection.

Because young people are so vulnerable to HIV infection, it is essential to be well informed about HIV risks and prevention strategies, so that together, our generation can end HIV and AIDS.

1. How Is HIV Spread?

HIV is present in the bodily fluids of persons infected with the virus. A person who is HIV-positive can pass the virus to others through their semen (including the drops of “pre-ejaculate” fluid that flow from the penis prior to ejaculation), vaginal secretions, breast milk, or blood. The virus is most commonly transmitted through the exchange of semen and vaginal secretions during sex. HIV is transmitted not only through vaginal or anal sex between a man and a woman; it can also be transmitted through anal sex between two men. Oral sex also carries some risk for HIV transmission. HIV can also be passed from an HIV-positive mother to her baby during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.

HIV can also be passed to others by transfusion of infected blood or by sharing needles with an infected individual for drug use, body piercing, or tattooing. Although using contaminated instruments during manicures, pedicures, or shaving may carry a risk of infection, HIV transmission through these routes is highly unlikely.

2. Ways that HIV Cannot Be Transmitted

There are many myths about how HIV spreads. HIV cannot be transmitted by any of the following:

- Sharing bath water or swimming pools
- Sharing toilet seats or using public toilets
- Bites from mosquitoes, bed bugs, or other insects.
- Tears or sweat.
- Saliva or kissing (HIV is not in saliva, but cut or bleeding gums may increase risk of kissing)
- Urine and faeces do not transmit HIV if they do not contain blood.

3. How can a person know if he or she — or his or her sex partner — has HIV?

Millions of people who are HIV-positive feel and look completely healthy for years. They have no symptoms, and have no idea that they are passing the virus to others. You cannot tell by merely looking at a person if he/she is infected with HIV!

The only way to know if you have been infected with HIV is to take an HIV test. The only way to know if your sex partner is HIV-positive is if he or she takes an HIV test and shares the result with you. The HIV test detects special cells (called HIV antibodies) that are present if the person is infected. Tests can usually detect HIV antibodies within six to eight weeks of exposure. In rare cases, it may take as long as six months for the antibody level to be detected by a test.

A positive HIV test means that the person has HIV antibodies and is infected with the virus. If the first test is positive, a second, different test may be conducted to confirm the results. A negative HIV test means that the person is not infected with HIV. Or it may mean that he or she is infected but has not yet made enough HIV antibodies to test positive. Someone who tests HIV-negative but suspects that he or she was recently exposed to the virus should take the test again in a few months.

4. Prevention of STIs/HIV

After reading this, or if you know someone who has HIV or AIDS, you probably want to know how to protect yourself from becoming infected. There are many things you can do:

- Abstain from all forms of sexual intercourse. Having sex as an adolescent is an unwise idea for many reasons — including the high risk of HIV to those who begin having sex at a young age.
• Stay away from situations that cause you to feel pressured or intimidated. For example, do not get intimately involved with an adult. Do not allow anyone to pressure you into unwanted or unsafe sex – or other unsafe activities. You have the right at any time to say no. If someone – anyone – tries to persuade or prevail upon you to have unwanted or unsafe sex, report that person to a trusted adult.
• If you choose to have sex, ensure you and your partner use male or female condoms.
• Never pressure another person to have unwanted or unsafe sex.
• Avoid alcohol and drugs. These substances affect your judgment, and make it more likely you will engage in risky behaviour that you regret later.
• Never share needles.
• If you suspect you have an STI, seek prompt and complete testing and treatment.
• If you need to receive a transfusion or blood product, be sure it has been properly screened for HIV and other STIs.
• If your skin is going to be pierced (by a needle, syringe, or other equipment), check to be sure that the equipment being used is sterile.
• If someone is raped, immediate treatment with anti-HIV medication can greatly reduce the chances of becoming infected. It is very important to seek immediate care if one is raped.

5. What About Living with HIV or AIDS?
People who are HIV-positive can live for a long time and can maintain a productive life. They may marry and have families. However, they need proper medical care, counselling, and social support. Counselling is important to ensure they start prompt treatment and understand the importance of taking good of themselves and their health in general. Counselling can also prepare a person feel more comfortable about disclosing his or her HIV status to current and past sex partners and to family members.

If you have a friend or family member living with HIV or AIDS, you may feel overwhelmed and not know how to help. There is a lot you can do. The most important is to provide love and attention. You can remind the person to take their medication (even if it causes side effects) and to keep medical appointments. If the person is sick or weak, you can assist with chores like shopping or cleaning.

Finally, you can educate others. You can help them understand how HIV is – and is not – transmitted. You can also remind others that every person deserves dignity, and that people living with HIV and AIDS have a right to live free of stigma and discrimination.

THE AHI YOUTH CLINIC

* Are you between the ages of 10 and 21 years?
* Are you struggling with a health or relationship problem?
* Have you been sexually abused/raped and don’t know what to do?
* Are you worried about getting pregnant or contracting a sexually transmitted infections/ HIV?

Send a text message, email, give us a call or visit our centre!
Address: 17 Lawal Street, Off Oweh Street, Jibowu, Yaba, Lagos
Telephone: 0812-344-5837
Email: info@actionhealthinc.org
Website: www.actionhealthinc.org
Hours of operation:
Monday – Friday: 8:00am – 5:00pm
Saturday: 9:00am – 1:00pm

CONFIDENTIALITY IS GUARANTEED
WHY DO I NEED BSE?

Girls should be aware of how their breasts normally look (shape, color and size) and feel so that you can report any changes. Regular BSE will help with this. Doing BSE help you to detect changes or lumps that may cause cancer. However, finding a breast change or lump does not necessarily mean there is a cancer.

Do BSE every month, but not when you are menstruating because your breasts are least likely to be tender or swollen. You can do it a few days after your period ends.

CHANGES TO LOOK FOR!

Check with your health care provider if you find any change in your breast(s) that causes you concern. Changes in your breasts may include:

• Development of a lump
• A discharge other than breast milk
• Swelling of the breast
• Skin irritation or dimpling
• Nipple abnormalities (such as pain, redness, scaliness, or turning inward)

IN FRONT OF A MIRROR

Step 1: Begin by looking at your breasts in the mirror with your shoulders straight and your arms on your hips. Here's what you should look for:

• Breasts that are their usual size, shape, and color
• Breasts that are evenly shaped without distortion or swelling
If you see any of the following changes, bring them to your doctor’s attention:

• Dimpling, puckering, or bulging of the skin
• A nipple that has changed position or an inverted nipple (pushed inward instead of sticking out)
• Redness, soreness, rash, or swelling

Step 2: Now, raise your arms and look for the same changes

Step 3: While you’re at the mirror standing, place your right hand at the back of your head. Then, take your left hand with fingers flat to your right breast. Remember to keep your fingers flat and together throughout. Starting from the outer upper part of the breast, go in a circular motion with a firm smooth touch (from left to right and back to the upper part near your armpit). While you do this, press down a little bit but not too hard so that you can detect any lumps. At the nipple, press gently to look for any signs of fluid coming out of nipple (this could be a watery, milky, or yellow fluid or blood). Repeat this for the left breast by raising your left hand to the back of your head and then use your right hand for the circular motion and check for the same signs.

IN THE BATHROOM

You can also do step 3 in the bathroom. Water makes the skin wet and slippery and this reduces friction while you touch and feel your breast. Cover your entire breast, using the same hand movements described in step 3

LYING DOWN

Step 4: Feel your breasts while lying down, placing a folded towel or pillow under your right shoulder and your right hand behind your head. Then examine your right breast with your left hand. With fingers flat, press gently in a circular motion (using a firm and smooth touch) starting from the outer upper part of your breast and then spiral towards the nipple (as described above). Check for the same signs. Cover the entire breast from
top to bottom, side to side—from your collarbone to the top of your abdomen, and from your armpit to your cleavage. Repeat same for your left breast by placing the pillow behind your left shoulder and your left hand behind your head.

Disclaimer: This self-examine is not a substitute for periodic examinations by a qualified doctor.

What if you find a lump?

One of the most frightening moments for a girl is seeing or feeling something different or unusual while performing breast self-examination. One of the most important reasons to do regular breast self-examinations is so that you know what is normal for your breasts. If you find a lump, it is important not to panic. If you discover lumpiness in one breast or feel something “different” in the tissue, or if you feel a definite lump, there may be valid reason for concern, and it is important to contact a health care provider. Sometimes, the lumpiness may be due to menstrual changes, but if you have nipple discharge or skin changes such as dimpling or puckering, you may want to see your health care provider right away. It is natural to be frightened when discovering a lump, but do not let the prospect of cancer keep you from taking action. Remember that most breast lumps are benign (not cancerous).

Have fun while doing this!

Source:

Testicular Self-Examination (TSE)

The testicular self-examination (TSE) is an easy way for boys to check their own testicles to make sure there aren’t any unusual lumps or bumps - which can be the first sign of testicular cancer.

Although testicular cancer is rare in teenage boys, overall it is the most common cancer in males between the ages of 15 and 35. It’s important to try to do a TSE every month so you can become familiar with the normal size and shape of your testicles, making it easier to tell if something feels different or abnormal in the future.

Here’s what to do:

• It’s best to do a TSE during or right after a hot shower or bath. The scrotum (skin that covers the testicles) is most relaxed then, which makes it easier to tell if something feels different or abnormal in the future.

• Examine one testicle at a time. Use both hands to gently roll each testicle (with slight pressure) between your fingers. Place your thumbs over the top of your testicle, with the index and middle fingers of each hand behind the testicle, and then roll it between your fingers.

• You should be able to feel the epididymis (the sperm-carrying tube), which feels soft, rope-like, and slightly tender to pressure, and is located at the top of the back part of each testicle. This is a normal lump.

• Remember that one testicle (usually the right one) is slightly larger than the other for most guys - this is also normal.

• When examining each testicle, feel for any lumps or bumps along the front or sides. Lumps may be as small as a piece of rice or a pea.

What to do in case you discover a swelling or lump:

If you notice any swelling, lumps, or changes in the size or color of a testicle, or if you have any pain or achy areas in your groin, let your doctor know right away.

Lumps or swelling may not be cancer, but they should be checked by your doctor as soon as possible. Testicular cancer is almost always curable if it is caught and treated early.

Source: Teens Health: http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/guys/tse.htm
Can you tell us about your educational background?

I attended Immaculate Heart Comprehensive High School, Maryland, Lagos, studied Mass Communication at the University of Lagos for my Bachelor’s degree and subsequently in 2009, obtained my Master’s degree in Public Health from the Royal Tropical Institute in the Netherlands.

And your professional background?

My work experience actually began immediately after I completed secondary school in Action Health Incorporated (AHI) where I worked as a Youth Assistant from July 1997-December 1998. I continued with AHI on a part-time basis from 2000-2003. After graduation from the University of Lagos, I worked with John Hopkins University, Center for Communication Program on the COMPASS Project for three years, and afterwards I worked briefly with Family Health International 360 (FHI360) before joining UNFPA in July 2011 where I now work as a Behaviour Communication Change/ Advocacy Analyst.

How did you get to apply for the Youth Assistants Programme at AHI?

I actually learned about Action Health Incorporated (AHI) through a friend of mine who was a member of the AHI-initiated Health and Life Planning Club in my secondary school. Although I wasn’t a member of the club, I was actively involved in the educational and outreach activities at the AHI Youth Center. Soon after we left secondary school, one of my friends who had started working at the AHI youth-friendly clinic as a Youth Assistant, gained admission into the university midway into 1997 and had to leave thereby creating a vacancy. I on the other hand was still awaiting my university admission results so I applied for the job and was hired. I worked there for the remaining part of the year and also throughout 1998.

What was it like working at AHI as a fresh secondary school leaver?

I was 17 years old when I started working with AHI and my experience with the organization helped me become focused and more responsible. Personally, I learnt how to manage my time and resources and was also able to set my life goals; I knew what I wanted to study for my first degree and second degree and the professional career I desired. Looking back now, I am fulfilled that I achieved these goals and much more.

My career path was greatly influenced by my contact with AHI because I discovered my passion for working with young people and providing information about sexual and reproductive health generally. All through my undergraduate years, I continued working with AHI on a part-time basis and was privileged to anchor two TV programmes - 'Youth Forum' and 'Growing Up', which was shown on Lagos Television (LTV) weekly. Going on air was fun for me and, of course, it satisfied my thirst for reaching out to young people with positive sexuality information. The TV shows also gave me leverage during my course of study as a Mass Communication student, as well as empowered me with the confidence and ability to express myself to an even larger audience – something not many young people my age could do at that time. I also represented Nigeria at global youth programmes in Portugal, India and U.S.A. through AHI. By the time I graduated from the University, I was ready to face whatever challenge life would bring my way.

You also started your own youth focused non-governmental organization (NGO)?

Yes, I did. By the time I graduated from the University of Lagos in 2002, I was all fired up and ready to do something to also make a difference for young people so, I started a youth focused NGO named Youth to Youth Initiative (Y2Y) with three young people with a similar vision. Y2Y was set up to promote behavior change among young people through positive peer influence. As founding members, we wanted to share so much of what we had gained through AHI and other agencies with other young people.

How would you describe your work now as a BCC/ Advocacy Analyst at UNFPA?

What I do as a Behaviour Change Communication and Advocacy Analyst with UNFPA is mainly to provide technical assistance to our partners at the State and Federal levels, as well as the Non-Governmental Organizations that we work with, to implement evidence-based communication programmes to improve the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) of women and young people. We also support youth participation to give young people a voice to advocate on issues that affect them at the community, state or national level. Similarly, we support the government to provide quality SRH services to meet the needs of our target audience.

From your experience working in youth development, what have you found to be some of the biggest challenges facing young people in
Nigeria today?

The challenges young people face today are essentially the same as years ago when I was a teenager—early marriage, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS and lack of access to information and services to address these problems etc. The health indicators on SRH for young people have not improved significantly and the dynamics and context are even more complex than they were before. Another problem is unemployment; a young person completes schooling and has nothing to do. And you know the saying, ‘an idle mind is the devil’s workshop’. This situation makes young people vulnerable to engaging in risky behavior. In addition, the quality of education is poorer now than it was a decade ago, and as a result we produce university graduates that are unemployable. Young people also need to be taught livelihood and entrepreneurial skills very early to enable them start their own businesses.

The parent-child communication gap, which is now even wider, doesn’t make things any easier. Parents need to pay attention to supporting their children with developing values and social skills needed to maintain healthy and responsible relationships. This is why the United Nations is helping the government to take responsibility for the health and development of young people. For instance, on the issues of early marriage among girls, early childbirth and maternal and child mortality, the UN acts as the intermediary between young people and the government.

And what are some of the biggest challenges facing those working in the youth development and SRH field in Nigeria today?

The first and biggest problem is access to funds, and this is because sexual and reproductive health education programmes and services are not usually a core part of the government’s budget. Unless the government increases investments in youth programmes, we will continue to have the current challenges with sustainability and impact of programmes. For instance, implementation of the Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE) in schools is inadequate across various states because of the over-reliance on external donors for programme funding. Meanwhile, this is the main programme government has designated as the country’s key education sector response to address the HIV epidemic affecting young people. If government seriously commits to implementing the FLHE programme and allocates the resources required, there will be a better chance of achieving universal coverage.

Inadequate capacity building and on the job training opportunities remains a challenge to developing and sustaining the pool of skilled workers providing SRH services. The basic systems to provide information to people on SRH are also lacking especially to reach rural and hard to reach areas. If people remain ignorant about simple life saving information such as use of contraceptives, delivery by a skilled birth attendant or early diagnosis and treatment of STIs, preventable deaths will continue to occur. The media can play a prominent role to enlighten people with accurate SRH information and promote positive health behaviours.

Are there any emerging solutions to help address these challenges?

Yes, take the case of the increasing number of private sector organizations interested in youth development today—that’s a good thing. However, they would do well to partner with NGOs to create win-win relationships i.e. the private sector organizations tap into the expertise of competent youth development NGOs to support their corporate social responsibility initiatives, while the NGOs secure indigenous funds to implement their social development missions thus reducing their over-reliance on international donor funding.

Various development partners, as well as the private sector and NGOs also need to design their programmes based on evidence and the cultural context of the communities where they choose to carry out their SRH and youth development initiatives. For instance, there are problems of child marriage in the northern part of the country, while there are serious issues of violence against young women and harmful traditional practices in the southern parts. This makes it essential to ensure that development programs are informed by documented evidence of the community’s needs.

What’s your advice for a young person interested in working in international development or starting a youth focused initiative?

The young person must have a passion and drive to make a difference in the field; must be self-motivated and ready to pay his/her dues. S/he has to be patient to develop the expertise required in the identified area of interest, adopt the values to live by and be able to answer the question “what do I stand for or want to be known for?” That’s the only way you’ll be able to carve a niche for yourself in your chosen field.
On Thursday, October 10th, 2013, HACEY’s Health Initiative hosted the 2nd International Day of the Girl Child Event in Nigeria held at the main auditorium of the University of Lagos. The program started with an opening remark given by Mr Isaiah Owolabi the Project Director of HACEY’s Health Initiative. He spoke on the objectives of the Hands up for HER initiative and her activities in the 24 African countries it currently runs in. He said educating the girl child means 'empowerment' and more effort should be put into it.

Speakers at the event were: Dr Olufemi Olaleye, MD/CEO of Optimal Healthcare Foundation; Mrs Ketimu Musa, Deputy Director, Lagos State Ministry of Education; Dr Y. O. Duze, Action Health Incorporated; Dr Joe Okei-Odumakin, President, Women Arise for Change Initiative; and Ms Yemisi Ransome-Kuti, Founder, Nigeria Network of Non Governmental Organization.

Dr Olufemi Olaleye, gave his address on cervical cancer ‘a disease that is preventable’. He said cervical cancer is a commonly talked about terminal disease, and that 25 people die daily from it. He spoke on cancer risk factors, prevention and management, and that every single cell with cellular origin can predispose to cancer. He said sexual history is a risk factor and that multiple sexual partner is a ‘predisposing risk factor’. In his address, Dr Olufemi talked about the causative factor - HPV as a virus that causes cervical cancer. He emphasised the need for screening tests for early prevention. During screening, the cervix is examined for abnormal cells. He also emphasised the need for a vaccine for female children. He said ‘Awareness and community involvement is key in our fight against high incidence of cervical cancer in Nigeria and Africa in general’.

Mrs Ketimu Musa, the Deputy Director of Education gave the keynote address on behalf of the Lagos State Commissioner of Education. She began the address by stating that the education and empowerment of the girl child is very important. Education is important as a process of thinking and self discovery. It is an investment in ‘human capital’ and helps in character building. She shared that a girl child questions authority only when educated. A good education makes a girl child strong and enables her look after herself. She concluded that good girl child education is a key to development and should be prioritized at the family, community and national level.

Dr Y. O. Duze, a Medical Doctor from Action Health Incorporated spoke on behalf of the organization. As a representative of Dr Uwem Esiet, she noted that education is essential to the total wellbeing of every girl child. She reminded her audience that 2 of the 8 Millennium Development Goals are on education. Dr Duze concluded her presentation by stating that education is not a luxury but a right of the girl child.

Dr Joe Okei-Odumakin, in her presentation shared her involvement in creating awareness about the need to educate the girl child; she said a girl child deserves
a good education. She said that discrimination especially for children with special needs e.g. autistic children should be addressed and the children catered for. In her address, she said the girl child empowerment is critical for a nation’s growth. Girls should be involved in decision making and be empowered, and to ensure the mandate that every girl child is educated. She also stressed the importance of the health of a girl and encouraged everyone to work towards this - ‘what we do for ourselves dies with us but what we do for the world stays’.

Ms Yemisi Ransome-Kuti, the Founder, Nigeria Network of Non Governmental Organization spoke on the need for students to challenge themselves and learn how to think and come up with solutions for problems. She said the brain counts even more than physical capacity and most barriers for students achieving results are psychological. She urged students to become people with integrity so they can be proud of who they are. She said religion is key and that knowledge about the religion one chooses helps us understand things more.

Mr Theophilus Aboderin, President of the Carrington Youth Fellowship Initiative (CYFI)Alumni, spoke on the CYFI program. He shared that the CYFI program is a youth-based initiative created by the United States consulate in Nigeria in 2011. The aim of the program is bringing and developing youth with exceptional skills together to make social change in their communities. He said the applications for 2014 cycle will be announced soon and ended by encouraging young change-makers to apply and share their vision through CYFI (www.cyfinigeria.org).

The Ambassadors of ‘Hands up for HER’ present – Mrs Florence Karl Ogwo, Ms Bukola Awoyemi, and Ms Omotola Fawunmi were introduced. Hands up for HER ambassador Ms Bukola Awoyemi gave her goodwill message reminding young girls to always remember they can be who they want to be. Goodwill messages were also given in absentia by the World Association of Girls Guide and Girls Scout, and by the President, African Citizens Development Foundation.

Ms Rhoda Robinson in her closing remark thanked the speakers, representatives of organizations, schools and individuals present for being a part of the program. She emphasized the importance of the girl child in the family and urged everyone to keep fighting for her rights.

Presentations given during the event are as follows:

- Fortune school - a play on the ‘voice of the girl child’
- Landmark College - a play on ‘the girl child’
- Babington Macaulay College – a play and song on the ‘Rights of the Girl Child’
- Lekan Owonikoko – Song and poem for the girl child

The event was attended by students from 42 secondary Schools across Lagos state, representatives from over 15 media organizations including radio and TV stations, newspaper and magazines, and online media. Representatives from over 50 civil societies and non-governmental organizations were presented. In summary, one thousand two hundred and seventy seven (1277) registered individuals were present at the event.

Special appreciation to Nestle plc for brand and product support; GSK for resource support, TV and Radio Continental for media support, University of Lagos, US Consulate Carrington Youth Fellowship Initiative, Uni-lag Anti-AIDS and EnactUs clubs.

For more details on the Hands Up for HER Campaign:
Visit: www.handsupforher.org
Follow us at: www.facebook.com/handsupforher; @handsup4her; www.youtube.com/handsupforher
Contact us via: handsupforher@gmail.com; +234813967570, +2347046835377
We all have the right to express ourselves and our wishes. It might feel more difficult to speak your mind if someone disagrees, or if someone tries to pressure or intimidate you. To ‘assert’ means to express your beliefs, feelings and needs in a straightforward way, without infringing on the rights of other people. The skill required to do so is called assertiveness and this piece is focused on exactly that: How to stand up clearly for yourself and your rights without putting the other person down.

**Being Assertive - How Is It Different from Being Aggressive, Manipulative and Passive?**

**Assertiveness** involves firmness or clear and straightforward presentation of views, without oppressing others. Assertiveness is positive and affirming. Assertiveness invites the other person to have dialogue.

**Aggressiveness** means standing up for one’s rights at the expense of the rights of others. It is negative and demanding. Some examples are blaming, criticizing, starting an argument, or even being violent. It’s no surprise that aggressive communication is not good for relationships.

**Manipulation** involves using deceiving, misleading, lying, or blackmailing someone to get what you want. You can see that it is not the same as being straightforward and assertive.

**Passiveness** is failing to express one’s needs and feelings at all, or expressing them so weakly or indirectly that you will be either misunderstood or ignored.

**Benefits of Assertiveness**

Asserting yourself can make a big difference. Learning to be assertive can also help you meet your own goals. For example, you can learn to tell a teacher you’d like a special responsibility. You can clearly communicate a request to a friend or family member. Being assertive can also help you resist pressure to do something you do not want to do. This may be resisting peer pressure to skip your homework. It may be knowing what to say and do if you experience sexual harassment. It can also help you avoid or resist pressure from someone who tries to force you to have sex.

People tend to admire others who are assertive and respectful. They are more likely to have honest relationships and to achieve what they want.

**Basic Assertiveness Skills**

It is easier to be assertive if you know your own values and have good communication skills. You can practice speaking up for yourself. This can include seeking opportunities (such as seeking a school leadership position), asserting your rights (such as not wanting to be married off while you are a child), or refusing things that other people want from you that are not what you think is best for yourself.

Do not be afraid to set limits and to repeat your message. If you are true to yourself and honest, you will be proud of yourself.

Here are some tips to help you be more assertive, whether you are initiating a discussion or responding to someone:

1. **Know what is most important to you.** This helps you draw boundaries and keep them. For example, “Protecting my health” or “Not getting in trouble” may be your priorities.

2. **Take a clear position:** Convey your message calmly, honestly, directly, and courageously. For example, “I want to apply to be a student leader. I’d like to ask for your support.”

3. **Use “I” statements.** Rather than putting your message in terms of someone else, speak up on your own behalf. Say what you want or feel.

4. **Practice assertive body language:** Your body language should match your message. Stand straight, look someone in the eye, practice using a strong tone of voice. (Smiling while you refuse something may lead to your being misunderstood.)
5. Give reasons for your position (especially if it is not a stranger), such as: “I’d like have a pet because I’m lonely at home most times since my brother left for boarding school”, or “No, keeping late nights exposes me to danger”, or “No, I have decided to finish school before dating” or “No, we could get expelled” or “No, I am too young to marry”, or “No, I don’t like being around people who are always drinking alcohol or smoking cigarette”, “I want to continue to university because it will prepare me to have a satisfying career”.

6. Turn the discussion: If need be, try saying something like: “I always thought you were smarter than that” or “I can’t believe you would ask me to do that. I thought you were my friend”.

7. Rely on your instincts or self-convinced: If a situation doesn’t feel right, it probably isn’t right. If you are in danger, leave immediately without discussion. Walk away with a confident attitude. Be sure not to return to that same scene as that may suggest you have had a change of mind.

The “ASSERT” Formula

Another way to think about assertiveness is the following formula of what assertiveness entails:

A: Attention: Get the other person to agree to listen to you. Find the right time, place, or method that helps him/her focus.

S: Soon, simple and short: Speak up when possible, as soon as your rights have been violated. Look the person in the eye and keep comments to the points.

S: Specific Behaviour: Focus on the behaviour that compromised your rights, not on the person. Tell the person exactly what behaviour disturbed you.

E: "Effect on me": Share the feelings you experienced as a result of the person’s behaviour. "I get angry when...” "I get frustrated when...” (NOT You did to me.)

R: Response: Describe your preferred outcome, what you would like to see happen instead and ask for some feedback on it.

T: Terms: If all goes well you may reach an agreement on how to handle the situation in future, agree to disagree or simply come to a compromise. Even if no agreement is reached, you have asserted yourself with dignity.

Why Isn’t Everyone Assertive?

Cultural norms sometimes get in the way of being assertive. Some people fear that if they are assertive, their behaviour will be misunderstood as rudeness or aggressiveness. Someone might think you are “over-reacting” by stating your feelings directly. It is even possible that if you are assertive, someone in authority might even punish you for being “disrespectful”.

When the two people communicating do not have the same social status, it can make it difficult for the person with less power or status to be direct. For example, in a marriage where the husband has absolute control, the wife and children may not feel the liberty to speak directly. In a marriage that is more equal, it is more likely that family members will feel freedom to assert their ideas or feelings.

Similarly, because as children we are taught to be respectful of adults, some young people remain submissive even if they are in a situation where they do not feel safe.

Self-assessment: How do I communicate when I am feeling uncomfortable?

Do you communicate more directly and respectfully in some situations than in others? Take this self-assessment quiz to learn more about your own style of communication.

When I am in an uncomfortable situation with a boy, I tend to be:

- Passive
- Assertive, respectful
- Aggressive
- Indirect or manipulative

When I am in an uncomfortable situation with a girl, I tend to be:

- Passive
- Assertive, respectful
- Aggressive
- Indirect or manipulative

When I am in an uncomfortable situation with an adult male, I tend to be:

- Passive
- Assertive, respectful
- Aggressive
- Indirect or manipulative

When I am in an uncomfortable situation with an adult female, I tend to be:

- Passive
- Assertive, respectful
- Aggressive
- Indirect or manipulative

When I am in an uncomfortable situation with someone whom I do not view as my equal, I tend to be:

- Passive
- Assertive, respectful
- Aggressive
- Indirect or manipulative

I cannot answer this because I view everyone as my equal
For me, expressing feelings of anger is:

- Fairly easy (but I sometimes respond aggressively)
- Fairly easy (and I never respond aggressively or with violence)
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Somewhat or very difficult

For me, expressing when I feel vulnerable or weak is:

- Fairly easy (but I sometimes respond aggressively)
- Fairly easy (and I never respond aggressively or with violence)
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Somewhat or very difficult

**ANALYZE THIS RESPONSE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONFLICT</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
<th>Aggressive</th>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Assertive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 A girl is upset that her friend Lulu has been making fun of her to Amina. She says:</td>
<td>a. Lulu, I’m upset that you were making fun of me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Lulu, you’re the dumbest person in the world and I’m going to spread stories about you!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Oh, it’s okay, I guess.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Comfort passes a magazine seller on the way home. He offers her chocolates. Comfort does not want to accept them. She says:</td>
<td>d. Um, thank you.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e. I have no interest. I do not want you to ask me again.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 A boy asks a girl to go out with him. She does not want to. She says:</td>
<td>f. Thank you, but I do not want to. Sorry.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g. Um...okay.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>h. I would never go out with someone like you. Just get away from me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Lanre’s friend calls him for a copy of the answers to the homework. Lanre says:</td>
<td>i. Can’t you do anything on your own?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>j. I do not feel comfortable about it. We’re expected to do our work on our own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>k. If I have to...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Answer Key:**

Assertive responses are: a; e; f; j. Passive responses are: c; d; g; k. Aggressive responses are: b; h; i.

[Note: In some situations, if you feel endangered, it is more important to ensure your safety than to be respectful. Do you think Conflict #2 presents a danger to Comfort?]

**Takeaway Message**

Assertiveness is the act of expressing your belief, feelings and needs without violating the rights of other people. Assertiveness is not the same as aggressiveness or manipulation. Being assertive has many advantages; particularly, it can help you feel respected and safe as well as build honest relationships. However, certain factors such as culture and gender roles may make it difficult for individuals to be assertive. Remember, everyone can learn to be more assertive—it’s a skill worth developing.

The article is adapted from Action Health Incorporated’s publication – “Family Life and HIV Education Students’ Handbook for Junior Secondary Schools”
Married Adolescent Girls Go Back To School in Adamawa and Kaduna States

Significant numbers of Nigerian adolescent girls are burdened with unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion complications and sexually transmitted infections, including high levels of new HIV infections. About 50% of girls in the country are already married by age 20. Although there are regional variations in the nature of sexual and reproductive (SRH) problems they face, the magnitude of the problem is greater in Northern Nigeria, where hundreds of thousands of young girls, due to various reasons especially the lower age at marriage, lower access to modern family planning methods, as well as pre and post-natal care, are exposed to higher levels of illness and death as a result of pregnancy and childbearing. Pregnancy and childbearing also affect school retention rates adversely, with many girls discontinuing schooling when they get married.

With funding support from the United Nations Population Fund, Action Health Incorporated (AHI) is currently working in collaboration with community leaders and the Ministries of Health, Education and Women Affairs in the states of Adamawa and Kaduna to address these challenges.

Over the period of 2013, a series of advocacy activities were conducted to discuss and find ways to remove the barriers to retaining girls in school. Some District Heads, village heads and youth leaders in Jimeta in Yola North and Kaduna North local government areas (LGAs) acknowledged that there are a variety of reasons why men give out their daughters in marriage at an early age; reasons that included the need to get the bride price from the prospective husbands, to parents not wanting their girls to engage in pre-marital sex once they reach puberty. Once they get married, some husbands also do not permit their wives to continue schooling because they expect them to stay at home to take care of the children.

Following agreements with the community leaders, some of the girls with their babies and the nanny

Some of the married girls in school in Yola

Creche facility provided in Yola

Some of the girls with their babies and the nanny
outreach activities were undertaken to seek the support of parents, guardians and husbands of the young girls, who were interested in returning to school. By the end of the first school term in 2013, AHI had worked with 100 married girls and their families to surmount some of the barriers to reenrollment in school including a lot of paperwork and navigating the required formalities. With the support of the State’s Ministry of Education, Government Day Secondary School, Old GRA, Yola and Government Girls Secondary School, Unguwan Sarki, Kaduna were designated as schools to enroll the young mothers. To address some of the challenges of retention for adolescent girls, sanitation facilities were provided for the schools and crèches established within the premises so the young mothers have a place to leave their babies while they attend classes. Referral mechanisms have also been set up with the youth-friendly clinics established as part of the project in the Primary Health Centres in Ajiya, Yola and Unguwan Shani, Kaduna to increase the girls’ access to sexual and reproductive health information and services including family planning.

Noteworthy is the decision made by the Ministry of Education in Adamawa State to waive school fees for these girls in the state, and the promise of support to the girls throughout their years of study. In addition, the Ministries of Women Affairs in both project states indicated their commitment to continuing support for the initiative to ensure sustainability.

Commemorating World AIDS Day

Every year on December 1, the World AIDS Day is commemorated to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and to demonstrate international solidarity in the face of the pandemic and since 2011, the theme for World AIDS Day has been ‘Shared Responsibility in Strengthening Results for an AIDS-Free Generation.’ Bearing in mind that young people are critical to the fight against HIV/AIDS, Action Health Incorporated (AHI) commemorated the day with 114 young people from secondary schools around the AHI Youth Centre in Lagos on December 6, 2013 and used the opportunity to offer HIV prevention education and testing services.

The information session conducted by programme staff addressed the modes of transmission and how to prevent infection as well as issues of stigma and discrimination against people living with the virus. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and clarify misconceptions, free HIV counselling and testing was available for those who wanted to know their HIV status while red ribbons, educational/promotional materials (pamphlets and t-shirts with HIV prevention messages) were distributed to all participants.

Time was also set aside for games, quizzes, energizers, choreography and even drama skits. Leading the quiz competition were Immaculate Heart Senior Secondary School (1st position), Mainland Senior Secondary School (2nd position) and Angus Memorial Senior High School (3rd position). Other schools that participated are Shomolu Senior High School, Jibowu Junior High School and Morocco Junior High School. Prizes were also awarded to the winners of the quiz and dance competitions.
Make 2014 Your Year to Shine
Yes! Go on Ahead and Make a Plan to Succeed at What's Important To You During This Year
"Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen, others make it happen." - Michael Jordan

Goal Setting Worksheet

My Top Priority is: ________________________________________________________________

Date I will Achieve: _____________

Daily Steps I will Take Towards this Accomplishment:
1. ___________________________________________________________________________
2. ___________________________________________________________________________
3. ___________________________________________________________________________
4. ___________________________________________________________________________
5. ___________________________________________________________________________

My Second Priority is: __________________________________________________________

Date I will Achieve: _____________

Daily Steps I will Take Towards this Accomplishment:
1. ___________________________________________________________________________
2. ___________________________________________________________________________
3. ___________________________________________________________________________
4. ___________________________________________________________________________
5. ___________________________________________________________________________

My Third Priority is: ____________________________________________________________

Date I will Achieve: _____________

Daily Steps I will Take Towards this Accomplishment:
1. ___________________________________________________________________________
2. ___________________________________________________________________________
3. ___________________________________________________________________________
4. ___________________________________________________________________________
5. ___________________________________________________________________________
In love and in danger by Barrie Levy

W ith more and more young adults been hit, slapped or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend, this book is definitely a must read for everyone.

In love and in Danger is a book for young people who have questions about abusive dating relationships. This book helps them to understand the causes and consequences of their situation, teaches them what they can do about it and helps them to discover how to build healthier relationships. If you love him and he hits you, you need to read this book and do something about the situation urgently!

How to Say No and Keep your friends by Sharon Scott

Y ou may think nobody can force you to do anything you don’t want to do. In a way, you are correct. Usually, no one forces you to do anything you don’t want to do. The negative peer pressure discussed in this book is verbal pressure, when people tease you to put you down. After reading this award winning book, adolescents would know what to say or do with such trouble traps as: “Come on, it’ll be fun, everyone is doing it”, “It’s no big deal”, “Be cool”, “Grow up”, “Trust me, we won’t get caught”. The message in this book is to STAND OUT, not to fill in!

Girls in Power by Laura Fingerson

L aura Fingerson, an Assistant professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee uses the book Girls in Power to examine menstruation and how it plays a part in power interaction between boys and girls. The book offers a fascinating and unique look at the social aspects of menstruation in the lives of adolescent girls – and also in the lives of adolescent boys. For every girl who menstruates, Girls in Power is a must read!

To read these books and many more, visit The Library @ Action Health Incorporated, 17, Lawal street off Oweh, Jibowu – Yaba Lagos