

World Aids Day

Fighting Aids through music

Art. Through music and drama, information and knowledge about HIV/Aids is easily shared among all categories of people.

BY EDGAR R. BATTE
rbatte@ug.nationmedia.com

At a time when the cause of HIV/Aids was still a mystery in Ugandan society, with some folks attaching witchcraft to its emanation, singer Philly Bongole Kifomusana Lutaaya (RIP) announced that he was HIV positive.

It was a brave move that put a face to a scourge that was ravaging through Ugandan society like a bushfire. His song titled *Alone & Frightened*, became the anthem to amplify the strong lyrical message about HIV/Aids.

"I wanted to put something down, something musical and artistic about my feelings and what I thought were the feelings of other HIV/Aids patients, the feeling of helplessness, the feeling of loneliness. I wanted to express what I felt within myself," Lutaaya said in an outro to the song.

As a child artist and lecturer Bruno Ruganzu recalls listening to Lutaaya's song. With peers, they attempted to sing word for word for the song that enjoyed airplay on the then Radio Uganda and Uganda Television (UTV).

"Musically, the message of HIV/Aids was spread to young and old via the well-executed lyrical genius of musicians such as Philly Bongole Lutaaya. Through music and drama, information and knowledge were shared among all categories of people. As an artiste, music especially the conscious kind has always had a powerful impact on society otherwise why would politicians have musicians at their rallies," Mr Ruganzu says.

Hip-hop artiste Sylvester Kabombo believes that the biggest impact of music in the fight against HIV/Aids started with *Alone & Frightened* because it was coming from a victim himself crying out to the public not to discriminate him but to love and care for people like him.

"We can't talk about the impact of music in the fight against Aids and not mention Philly Lutaaya and his song *Alone & Frightened*. That's the strongest pillar in fight against Aids and stigma that probably Africa has ever seen, artiste Mr Ruganzu says.

Actor Ashraf Simwogerere can't agree less. "The mere fact that the man (Lutaaya) who first went public to declare his HIV status was a musician, is a sign that music has played a big role in the fight against HIV/Aids. He used music to pass his message."

Hip-hop singer GNL Zamba, real name Ernest Nsimbi, sings in his song, *Story Ya Luka*, that a nation built on discrimination and stigma is one built on sand so to say weak.



The late Philly Bongole Lutaaya used his music to deliver anti-HIV/Aids messages to people from different parts of the country. FILE PHOTO

"Joy only comes when you lend a weak man a hand. I understand Aids is an enigma but we have to find it in our hands to fight stigma," he raps in one of the lines of the song.

Singer Hilary Kiyaga famously known as Dr Hilderman, says majority of the people associate with music and if every artiste said something about the scourge, particularly in December when people are celebrating and attending concerts, the message would reach a big spectrum of the public.

"It is at music events that people get high and drink therefore, any positive message about HIV/Aids would impact positively. We have recorded songs about HIV awareness, which songs act as sensitisation tools that the disease is still present and deadly. So messages like stigma against the infected are vital which we package in those songs."

GOOD CHANNEL

Music commands attention in society and when used to drive such campaigns people listen because they are entertained and educated at the same time. They find refuge in a song. There are many people who would fight it hard to listen to long speeches but comfortable to taken in these messages when put in a song that he/she can play over and over again, majority of the people associate with music and if every artiste said something about the scourge, particularly in December when people are celebrating and attending concerts, the message would reach a big spectrum of the public.



GNL Zamba aka Ernest Nsimbi



Dr Hilderman aka Hilary Kiyaga

tion tools that the disease is still present and deadly. So messages like stigma against the infected are vital which we package in those songs."

Dr Hilderman is behind *Kampe*, a song that promotes use of condom.

His duet, *Mbulira*, with Rema Namakula, talks about a woman's royalty even when she finds out her man is infected and could have infected her too.

"In the song we advocate for couples to visit health facilities and get tested," he adds.

He also featured on an all-star song titled *Wekuume*. A couple of Ugandan artistes have collaborated on songs to drum up message, for example, on the Aids song, *Don't give up and A little bit of love*.

"In 2011, I coordinated a Hip Hop Album that saw various Uganda Hip-Hop Artists come together to record songs sensitising people

about HIV/Aids. The initial phase of the project which was funded by Tamon Oshimon saw us visit HIV/Aids victims in Kisenyi, a Kampala slum where victims shared their stories," he says.

Living positively

Singers Livingstone Kasozi and Prince Jjuuko both came out about living positively with the virus and sang song to detail the melancholy that HIV/Aids brings.

The message in Paul Job Kafeero's *Walumbe Zaaya* is another artistic work that explores the subjects of Aids and death.

There is an impact when an artiste puts rhythm and melody to these messages.

"Music commands attention in society and when used to drive such campaigns people listen because they are entertained and educated at the same time. They find refuge in a song. There are

many people who would fight it hard to listen to long speeches but comfortable to taken in these messages when put in a song that he/she can play over and over again," Mr Kabombo says.

Entertaining

Anti-alcohol activist Bill Kahirimanyi agrees, adding that music is entertaining and has an emotional appeal to humane emotions.

"I believe music with positive social influencing messages that create awareness and caution leading to behavioral change is one of the biggest contributors to the fight against HIV Aids," he argues.

A founder of Stop Underage Drinking Uganda, Mr Kahirimanyi observes that music is also the lowest cost effective medium for sensitization that he uses in campaigns to promote healthy youth lifestyle options.

"It gets airplay on radio, TV and social media with rarely any additional charge after production fees. SUDU is in the forefront of fighting Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) a primary concern to HIV/Aids, because AODA promotes actions which increase the initial risk of infection.

Although HIV/Aids can affect anyone, the risk of infection is significantly higher in people suffering from substance use disorders, whether the risk is of direct exposure through needles (intravenous drug use) or increased likelihood of high risk behaviour (like unprotected sex) due to loss of judgment and impaired reasoning," he explains.