

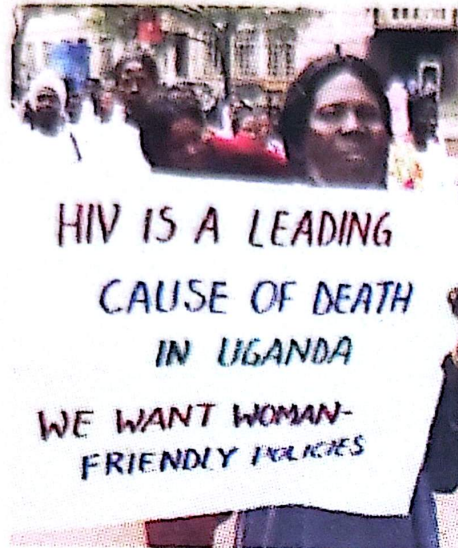
HIV/Aids: The rising catastrophe in Uganda

While growing up in the late 90s and early 2000s, there seemed to be a catastrophic life-sucking demon that we all dreaded! This would rob every ounce of energy from a once vigorous body leaving it as just a bag of bones. This was a disease that was sung about everywhere - on radio and TVs and in papers. It was the killer of our time. Unlike in the 80s and early 90s when the disease was still a mystery, we knew what we were dealing with. The virus' wrath had clearly been spelt out and everyone watched out for their lives.

Every drama on radio was about HIV/Aids, every skit, every book! All the visitors we received at school talked about HIV. They would tell us about the rampant disease and how it had killed millions of young people in the country.

Thanks to the lethal invasion by this virus, the country's life expectancy stood at 46 years. These were terrible times to live as young men and women in school. We would not share a razor blade, needle or any other sharp object.

The following decade was not as scary - yes people were still



dying, but not like chicken. The numbers had stabilised a bit, if anything declined from the shocking prevalence rate of 10.9 per cent in 1999 to around 8.5 per cent (MoH). The country had started taking a different turn. Antiretroviral (ARVs) for everyone who tested positive were introduced. These helped a lot to keep infected people in great shape.

People started leaving comfortable lives. Anti-Stigma campaigns were rolled out and counsellors encouraged victims to live positively. What had made HIV stand out in the 90s was that it really looked ugly. Its ugly symptoms played a big role in reminding peo-

ple, especially the youth to watch out. The stigma was high that you would risk being an outcast if you contracted the disease. All these were measures in place and people would not take any chances.

ARVS made life a lot easier. HIV was now seen as any normal disease. Today, 67 per cent of the infected people are on medication.

Government concentrated on caring for the sick population and forgot to prevent more people from contracting the virus. This is why there are 52,000 new infections every year (UNAIDS). If there is no urgent intervention, the projected annual infections will be 340,500 by 2025. The country's goal is that by 2030, we should be an HIV-free country. But how is this going to happen when the virus is continues spreading?

Today 1.4 million people in Uganda live with HIV/Aids. So it is highly unlikely that there is drama on radio calling for prevention of HIV or literature against the virus. Today, there is much fear of getting pregnant among youth than HIV. The use of condom has also drastically dropped.

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