U.S. Agency for International Development

Bureau for Global Health

# SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

## Global Church Network Uses HIV/AIDS Posters to Launch Discussion on Stigma and Discrimination

THE STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION that surround HIV/AIDS are often deadly. The resulting silence can keep HIV-positive people from seeking the help they need and hinder much-needed education efforts to prevent further spread of the disease.

Though many in the faith-based community have been reluctant to discuss HIV/AIDS openly, the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), a global network of 86 churches and church-related organizations, has taken a stand against the silence. Through a global poster competition, supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and its partner, the CORE Initiative, more than 430 churches, schools, and faith-based community groups have introduced the subject of HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination to their members.

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>
> –HIV/AIDS poster competition organizer, India

Throughout 2003, competition organizers in 32 countries encouraged local groups and congregations to discuss basic facts about HIV/AIDS and attitudes toward the disease within their churches, with an emphasis on the hurt that stigma and discrimination can cause. Participants then drew on these discussions to create posters with messages of hope and compassion.

English, French, and Spanish toolkits distributed to national poster competition steering committees and local groups helped facilitate informed discussion. The toolkits offered basic information on HIV/AIDS and related stigma and discrimination; discussion resources tailored to local parishes, churches and church-supported schools; and suggestions for creating poster art.

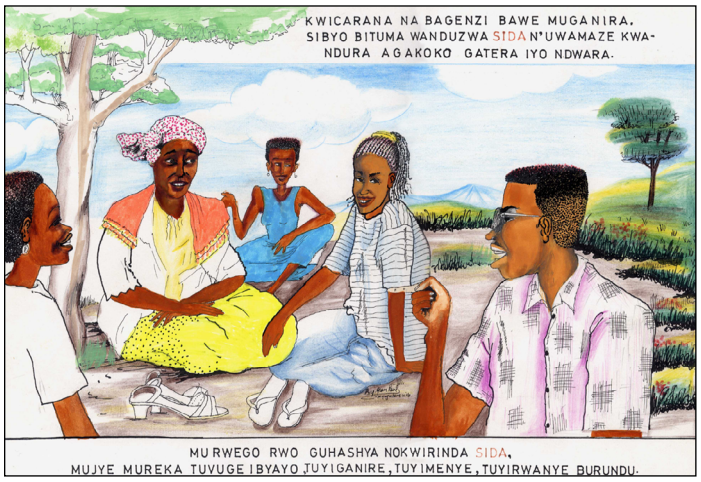


Photo courtesy of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance

A winning poster from Rwanda by Hakizimana Jean Paul carries important messages: "HIV/AIDS is not contracted through sitting or conversing with HIV-infected persons. In order to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, we must know it, talk about it, and fight completely."

Posters were then displayed nationally, and national judging panels selected 80 winning entries to be shown at the United Nations on World AIDS Day 2003.

Two key EAA resources, developed with USAID funding, are currently helping to extend the dialogue generated by the poster competition. A CD-ROM, Signs of Hope Steps for Change, includes the winning posters and multilingual HIV/AIDS-related resources; and a brochure titled "Next Steps: For positive change in attitudes that cause HIV and AIDS-related stigma and discrimination" provides

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local groups with a starting point to integrate HIV/AIDS-related messages into additional activities, from drama to essay competitions.

The poster competition reached thousands of people in developing nations, and many were challenged to examine the role of the Church in allowing stigma to create a discriminatory environment for people living with HIV/AIDS. Conversations about compassionate treatment for those affected by the disease moved beyond churches, into schools, youth groups, and professional artistic venues. Said one HIV/AIDS poster competition organizer in India, "Some pastors talked about HIV/AIDS—at least about the global poster competition—from the pulpit, which is a step forward in a hitherto 'silent' church."

One Indonesian campaign organizer testified to the project's unusual impact on local attitudes in his country: "A national church has said they … will write about HIV/AIDS in their monthly church magazine, in languages that can be understood at the local level. This magazine does get into the local villages, and they hope that gradually through this method, they can help the people to understand the danger of HIV/AIDS."

The global poster exhibition will travel to Bangkok, Thailand, in July 2004 for the XV International AIDS Conference.

http://www.coreinitiative.org
http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/

Multiple Countries, May 2004