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SUCCESS STORY: KENYA

Rock Concert Increases HIV Awareness

USAID supports a World AIDS Day concert that combines hot music and cool prevention messages



Internews

Al, lead singer of the group Calabash, performs his signature reggae music for an admiring crowd.

Popular gospel singer Roughtone sang to the concert crowd: “Let’s stop AIDS and abstain. Don’t have sex before you get married. You are precious!”

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MORE THAN 6,000 YOUNG KENYANS who attended a free concert in Nairobi on December 5, 2004, in honor of World AIDS Day heard some “cool,” yet accurate and accessible, information about HIV/AIDS along with the featured reggae, gospel, hip-hop, and *benga* music.

The seven disc jockeys who served as masters of ceremony (emcees) and hosted the event had been trained at a week-long reporting workshop, sponsored by Internews’ *Local Voices* project with support from the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief through USAID. Training was provided by journalist and radio personality George Collinet, whose weekly *Afropop Worldwide* is heard on 150 stations in Africa, Europe, and the United States. His instruction improved the disc jockeys’ knowledge of HIV/AIDS and helped them understand the important role they could play in advising listeners on prevention and the importance of testing and counseling.

The training enabled the emcees to make their HIV/AIDS awareness messages understandable and unthreatening to even the youngest concertgoers. Popular gospel singer Roy Smith Mwaita, known onstage as Roughtone, urged the audience, “Let’s stop AIDS and abstain. Don’t have sex before you get married. You are precious!”

Kenyan radio journalist Sammy Muraya described the crowd as having a great time singing along and repeating the HIV/AIDS messages. “I remember a group of girls behind me chanting, ‘We’ve chosen to abstain!’” he said. According to Dan Oloo of the Metro FM station, the disc jockeys also enjoyed the concert. “Most deejays are always in the studio with a microphone and that’s it. Seeing the crowd’s great response to the AIDS messages we presented was incredible!”

Roughtone was one of 15 musicians and two comedy groups who performed at the concert. All had received an HIV/AIDS briefing at their auditions and informational pamphlets for reference during the concert to ensure clear, accurate messages.

To reinforce the messages from the stage, concertgoers could stop at an on-site counseling and testing center. Ultimately, 38 individuals took advantage of the 20-minute counseling sessions held during the concert, a record for such an event, according to coordinator Stanley Ngara. “We had more people waiting,” he said. “Many of them booked appointments for the following weeks to get tested.”

The concert was broadcast live on Metro FM, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation’s youth radio station, through which more than 300,000 Kenyans heard the concert’s HIV/AIDS messages. Four local TV stations featured the concert on their weekly entertainment update programs.