

# SCENARIOS

## Young Voices Travel Far: Young Africans from 25 countries educate themselves and others by creating scripts for short films for mass distribution

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*"Communication strategies need to be redirected so that they give prominence to the creation of communication environments which encourage interpersonal communication, dialogue and debate, and which focus as much on providing a voice to those most affected by HIV as they do on educating them through messages."*

Thomas Scalway, "Missing the Message: 20 Years of HIV Communication", Panos, London: 2003

from **AFRICA**

### Background

Young people are the key to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS. They account for over 50% of all new infections, yet mass communication initiatives have often treated them as objects to which information is directed, rather than as agents of change in their own right.

In 2002, Olga coordinated the national **SCENARIOS FROM AFRICA** contest in her native Burkina Faso, resulting in the highest number of participants for that country to date. She also produced audio versions of the thirteen existing **SCENARIOS** films which were distributed to scores of radio stations.

### Case Study

**SCENARIOS FROM AFRICA** is a communication process which invites young people to create narratives for films about HIV/AIDS. Leading African directors transform the winning ideas into short fiction films for distribution across the continent and beyond.

In January 2004, Olga co-directed, with young director Hamet Fall Diagne from Senegal, her first **SCENARIOS** films, **Under Pressure** and **No Time to Drop Your Guard** (see panel, right), under the guidance of celebrated Burkinabè director Fanta Régina Nacro.

Like Olga, young people feature in the production of the **SCENARIOS** films as writers, contest implementers, peer educators, jurors, advisors, directors, actors, trainee technicians... They are also always enthusiastic observers and participants on film sets and play a central role in the use and distribution of the films at community level.

**"The cricket can be held in the palm of the hand but its voice is heard in the entire savannah."**

African proverb illustrated by the film **African Solidarity** (see panel left)

The **SCENARIOS** films are dubbed into multiple languages and donated to television stations. They have been broadcast in almost every country in sub-Saharan Africa, often at prime time over months and years. They have been incorporated into youth programmes and even broadcast in the body of the evening news. They are also used extensively as a discussion tool at community level across the continent.

*"...the 'Scenarios from the Sahel' films are a vision of young people, they present things as young people recount them..."* **Young person, Burkina Faso**

*"Young people say they are moved by the stories recounted in the films and many of them say that their behaviour has changed or is going to change after seeing 'Scenarios from the Sahel'."* **External Evaluation Report, Burkina Faso/Togo, 2003**

The young participants' stories have been published in book form and transformed into theatre and radio plays. All the participants' stories are archived, as a resource for programme managers and researchers. The selection jurors formulate their own "Observations and Recommendations" about what they have learned from the stories for immediate circulation. An in-depth research project analysing all 14,000 stories written by young Africans for the **SCENARIOS** contests since 1997 will soon be underway.

Funding permitting, the next **SCENARIOS FROM AFRICA** contest will take place in early 2005.

### Lessons learned

The creativity, energy, and enthusiasm of young Africans are invaluable and largely untapped resources for HIV/AIDS mass communication initiatives. Young people are the world's hope for changing the course of the epidemic and must play an ever greater role in increasingly interactive mass communication efforts.



**A Call to Action** is based on creative ideas by Grace Dovi Nassiva, age 15, Ghana, and Maman Lawali Tankari, aged 20, Niger. Alarmed at how HIV has affected the lives of people close to her, especially a cherished teacher, young Sali Arkutu launches an appeal for improved access to anti-retroviral treatment in her country. Her voice is heard at the highest level.



*"Nobody ever listens to us. We participated in the contest because it finally gave us a chance to say what we think and what we feel."* **Female contest participant, Senegal**

*"...as young people themselves have said, it is a contest that speaks to them, gives them something to reflect upon, to discuss, to speak out about, and allows them to put forward their vision of the fight [against AIDS] ...."* **External Evaluation Report, Burkina Faso & Togo, 2003**

Drawing inspiration from a French model, the process is designed to help young people contextualize the epidemic within their own experience and to allow their voices to be heard. 43,000 young people from 25 African countries have participated in the **SCENARIOS** contests to date, half of them as members of mixed-gender teams. In the process, they have increased their understanding of HIV/AIDS and generated considerable dialogue within their communities.

*"AIDS is replacing football as the most talked about subject. Before we were not interested, but now we are."* **Contest participant, Senegal, to external evaluator**

*"It is important to underscore the fact that many children wrote their scenarios in dialogue with their parents or siblings."* **NGO partner, Burkina Faso**

The winning scripts are adapted for film production with young people and local specialists, especially PLWHA.

15 new films are now available, including two by young directors. One of those young directors is Olga Kiswendsida Ouédraogo, from Burkina Faso. Olga won the first **SCENARIOS** contest in 1997 and acted as on-set advisor to the acclaimed African director, Idrissa Ouédraogo as he transformed her winning idea, about the embarrassment of buying condoms, into the film "The Shop". That film is now available in at least twenty languages and has been broadcast in almost every country in sub-Saharan Africa and as far afield as Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Haiti and Fiji, reaching tens of millions of people.



**Never Alone** was written by the youngest **Scenarios from Africa** contest winner to date, ten-year-old Christian Abidi Businge of Uganda. Told in the simple, natural words of a child, this is the moving story of a little boy named Sam. He is struggling to understand what happened to his daddy, why his mummy is so ill, and the reasons behind his aunt's oft-repeated promise to always be there for him.

Olga was a member of the national Burkinabè and the international jury for the 2000 **SCENARIOS** contest. Olga's success in the **SCENARIOS** contest led to invitations to several international film festivals. In 2001 she attended the Namur Film Festival in Belgium at the invitation of the organisers, and participated, with four other young members of the **SCENARIOS** team, in a screenwriting workshop.



**Under Pressure**, co-directed by Olga Kiswendsida Ouédraogo and Hamet Fall Diagne, is based on a creative idea by Oby Akaneme, age 23, Nigeria. Amaka is ridiculed by a group of girls at her school because she doesn't have a mobile phone. The smooth-talking, forty-something Nico offers his "assistance".



**No Time to Drop Your Guard** was co-directed by Hamet Fall Diagne and Olga Kiswendsida Ouédraogo. Abu, the dashing star of talk radio, can't believe his ears when a young caller says that protecting herself from HIV is no longer important, because AIDS medicines are now available.



**Sexually Transmitted Marks** is based on ideas by Kossi Yesunyo Gossou, age 18, Togo, and Régis Nkouma, age 20, Republic of Congo. After school one day, in two neighbouring classrooms, parallel stories are unfolding. How far will teachers and students go in their efforts to "adjust" marks through seduction?

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