

# KICKING AIDS OUT!

- USING SPORT AS A TOOL IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS -



Participants at the Kicking AIDS Out! Activity Day<sup>1</sup> at Norway Cup 2003 playing "Akalambe" or "Touch" (Photo: Lena Dannow, July 2003)

## TRUE OR FALSE?

"People who are physically fit and eat a balanced diet cannot get HIV". Lindiwe thinks for a moment, puts the card down by "false" and taps her classmate on the shoulder, so he can dribble the ball through the cones and get the next "true or false" card. This "true or false" relay is an example of the *Kicking AIDS Out!* movement games where sport skills and life skills are integrated, such as in Physical Education.

The games form part of an innovative new approach towards youth and HIV prevention. Former Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland describes it in the following terms: "Out of Africa comes a new method of using sport to unite children and youth to form an alliance against the ravages of HIV/AIDS. Infected or not, young people can find strength and information in games and the joy of sports."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A group of representatives from the different organisations of the Kicking AIDS Out Network arranged an activity day for around 200 children from international soccer teams during the Norway Cup in August this year. The Norway Cup gathers +/- 25.000 participants from club teams in more than 30 countries every year. NORAD (The Norwegian Development Agency) uses Norway Cup as a platform for sport as a tool in different development issues. In 2003 the theme was "Heading for Education". Previous themes included Kicking AIDS Out, Anti smoking campaigns etc.  
<http://www.norway-cup.no>

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Director-General, World Health Organization (in foreword, Pdf, Kicking Aids Out, [http://www.norad.no/english/files/Kicking\\_AIDS\\_out.pdf](http://www.norad.no/english/files/Kicking_AIDS_out.pdf))

## THE CHALLENGE

At the start of the new century, South Africa probably had the largest number of HIV-infected people of any country in the world<sup>3</sup>. This article describes a good idea and a joint effort across continents and countries, targeting the most vulnerable, but also the group with the strongest chance to change the trends of HIV infection in this part of the world. The fight against HIV/AIDS in South Africa is a fight on many levels. It's a fight against prejudice and stigmatisation, against ignorance and beliefs, against myths and traditions. The strongest weapon you can have in a fight like this is education – by focusing on the facts, the myths will lose their power.

Looking back at the last decade, there have been numerous efforts to try and cope with the epidemic and find a way to prevent the further spread of HIV. Despite all of these efforts, the numbers of newly infected and people who die because of AIDS are increasing in the whole of southern Africa. A recent national survey in South Africa found that 15.6 per cent of adults (aged 15 – 49) were infected with HIV in 2002.<sup>3</sup>

According to Whiteside & Sunter, around half of all people who acquire HIV become infected before they turn 25 and typically die before their 35<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>4</sup> Not only are youth known to be most at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, but also to be most open to positive messages conveyed in an appropriate context.

loveLife<sup>5</sup> says, “There is a clear correlation between aspiration and sexual behaviour. Young people who feel confident about their future and in control of their lives tend to display more responsible sexual behaviour. (...) It follows therefore that developing the potential and self-regard of a young person is essential to reducing HIV/AIDS, STIs and teenage pregnancy.”

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<sup>3</sup> Nelson Mandela/HRC Study of HIV/Aids, South African National HIV Prevalence, Behavioural Risks and Mass media, Household Survey (2002: 49). A collaborative effort of the Aids Development Research and Evaluation and Agence Nationale de Recherche sur le Sida (ANRS).

<sup>4</sup> Whiteside, A & Sunter, C. Aids: The Challenge for South Africa (Human & Rousseau Tafelberg; 2000).

<sup>5</sup> The loveLife Franchise - a manual for franchise holders – Pamphlet of the loveLife package, published by PPASA.

LoveLife is “a brand-driven national initiative to reduce the rate of HIV infection among South African teenagers by promoting sexual health and healthy lifestyles for young people.” STI = Sexually Transmitted Infection

## SPORT AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT

SCORE (Sports Coaches' OutReach [www.score.org.za](http://www.score.org.za)) is a community development organisation using sport as a medium for development. SCORE recruits and trains international volunteers, who are placed in mainly rural communities in South Africa, Namibia and Zambia. The volunteers stay for six months to a year implementing SCOREs programmes in the community.

Currently 45 volunteers from southern Africa, Europe and Canada are implementing SCORE programmes with the support and guidance of provincial staff teams. For many years, SCORE's focus was on sports development, and the main objectives were the training of teachers in physical education, the capacity building of sport leaders and networking of community sport structures.

The initiation of a new EU funded project<sup>6</sup> in 2000, broadened SCORE's scope and reach as far as community development is concerned, with new programmes focusing on the empowerment of women and girls in sport, integration and fair play and facility building. So far, (up to August 2003), the programme has resulted in the establishment of democratically elected sport structures in some 32 communities, who in turn have been trained and have organised numerous events. Furthermore, 32 sports facilities, which are managed by the communities themselves, have also been built.

Since the beginning of 2002, SCORE has been integrating HIV/AIDS awareness activities into all of its programmes and training staff to coordinate these activities. Many people react to this by asking "What does sport have to do with HIV/AIDS?"

In recent years, SCORE has seen that HIV/AIDS is becoming a threat to the sustainability of its programs. Teachers trained by SCORE have become sick and are no longer able to teach; the family structure of the children who SCORE volunteers reach out to is constantly being impacted on by HIV/AIDS; community structures SCORE

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<sup>6</sup> "Integrated Community Sports Program" (ICSP) funded under EU Program for Reconstruction and Development in South Africa

helped establish have fallen apart because key people have to focus on keeping their families - or themselves - alive instead of building their own capacities. HIV/AIDS is affecting everyone in one way or another, and SCORE has realised that it can play a powerful role in the fight to uphold the strength of the communities in which it works. Every week, SCORE volunteers reach out to more than 50 000 children in schools and communities throughout southern Africa, and a successful program with an impact on some of these children will spread out even further.

## THE NETWORK

The HIV epidemic is affecting the entire Southern African region, and many organisations are trying by any means possible to combat its spread. The idea to use sport as a vehicle to address HIV/AIDS issues was developed in Zambia and Kenya, and the concept spread to other countries. The result was the formation of the Kicking AIDS Out! Network in 2002.

Kicking AIDS Out! is an international network of organisations working together to use sport and physical activity as a means of raising awareness about HIV/AIDS and motivating behavioural change amongst the youth. The Kicking AIDS Out! Network believes that “sport and physical activity is the best way of attracting this target group and creating an environment conducive to sharing positive messages about HIV/AIDS”.<sup>7</sup>

The organizations of the Network are the following: SCORE, Sport in Action, EDUSPORT, the National Sport Council of Zambia, MYSA (Mathare Youth Sports Association), Sports and Recreation Commission of Zimbabwe, EMIMA , Right To Play, Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports, Commonwealth Games Canada and UK Sport.

Kicking AIDS Out! is a broad concept of integrating *sport skills* and *life skills* in physical activities at different levels of implementation. Depending on the focus of the individual

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.kickingaidsout.net>

organisation, Kicking AIDS Out! activities can be sport specific or involve movement games in Physical Education. Even drama, dance or poetry are used to spread a positive message about HIV/AIDS and other life skills areas.

The Network is very committed to action and implementation and is a forum to share ideas and experiences. Following the working principles, agreed upon in the constitution, all members must submit their organisational action plans and reports, and working groups are active in providing support to the network and its members. The Working Group on Marketing and Fundraising is planning fundraising workshops for the member organisations, while the Program Development Working Group is compiling a set of training materials for the whole network, focusing on Peer Leaders and Train-the-Trainer courses.

Often the world of NGO's fighting for limited resources is characterised by competition and territorial disputes, but in Kicking AIDS Out! there is a genuine will to share and exchange experiences and expertise, which makes this network so dynamic.

Organisations from the whole region of southern Africa are collectively looking into how to use their resources in a fight that concerns all. At the same time, there is an openness towards loosening up the classical donor – recipient roles, which brings a new balance to these relationships and makes it possible to achieve the best result for all parties.

Organisations that have previously been seen solely as donors or sponsors are now participating as partners, playing an active role in shaping the future of “sports as a tool for development” and not only deciding on the size of the funding.

## HOW SPORT CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE



**Sticks Relay**



**“Agode”**

*Children from the Zambian organisation Sport in Action playing traditional games and relays*

*(Photos: Eli Jakobsen April 2003)*

A group of children are sitting in a circle, singing a rhythmic song and passing small rocks around. The pace is increasing. All of a sudden the leader shouts, “Stop!”

One of the children has three stones in front of him, and the young leader gathers the attention of the whole group. She asks the children to look at the stones as pieces of information about HIV/AIDS, and to reflect on what happened in the game. One child says: “Levi has three pieces, he knows a lot about AIDS now.” Another points out that other children are left without any pieces, and so the discussion starts: Why is it important to share information? What kind of responsibilities do we have towards our friends and families? What kind of information is important to share about HIV/AIDS? This is one example of how Sport in Action (SiA) in Zambia uses a traditional game like “Agode” to address issues around HIV/AIDS and children’s rights.

The Kicking AIDS Out! Network is collecting games like this and compiling resource packages for the use of all members and as part of sharing best practices for different age groups and target areas.

“Sports are the most popular activity among youth and have a unique chance to educate and influence the future generation of people. Sports give the children joy and hope, opportunities to learn whilst they play with others.”<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Brundtland emphasises a factor that becomes increasingly important in community development work, and in the fight against the spread of HIV. Hope is an important aspect in how we see our own future, and often determines whether we set goals for our future or not. If we can reach out to children and youth and show them that they can achieve something and be someone on the field, in a team and as individuals, perhaps we can help them find their own personal tools to create hope and a future for themselves. Young people with goals also seem to be more conscious about the choices they make about sexual activities.

Young people in South Africa are aware of HIV and AIDS. A survey done by loveLife in 2001<sup>9</sup> shows that 91% of all youth (12-17 year olds) had heard about HIV/AIDS, and 70% named HIV/AIDS as their second greatest concern after crime. Still, the virus continues spreading, and with the highest speed among young adults.

UNAIDS points out that the levels of risky behaviour are relatively high, while protective behaviour is generally low among men and women.<sup>10</sup> Awareness campaigns have reached out with their messages to youth to such an extent that some even say they’re “bored” with all the information. What they now need are the skills and tools to implement the knowledge and make changes in their lives.

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<sup>8</sup> Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Director-General, World Health Organization. See footnote 1)

<sup>9</sup> loveLife/Kaiser Family Foundation/South African National Youth Survey; Hot prospects Cold Facts – portrait of young South Africa (2000)

<sup>10</sup> Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS): Report on the global HIV/AIDS epidemic. 2002

### **Real-life impact**

A story from YES (Youth Education through Sport program) in Zimbabwe can help illustrate this. During a feasibility study in November 2002<sup>11</sup>, the team visited a YES group in a secondary school in Mvurwe.

The play performed showed a girl who was leading a life full of partying and high-risk behaviour. Her peers were trying to convince her to join in the sports and education activities of YES, but she kept following her own path and ignoring them. More and more friends changed their minds and joined YES, and she did finally turn around and join the group, because she saw that her behaviour had no future.

The play made a really strong impression on the visitors, but the strongest experience was the conversation with the girl and her friends afterwards, all representing YES as peer or youth leaders. In response to a question as to how they knew their work could really make an impact, she gave us a confident smile and said, “The play was about me.” The YES program is a countrywide initiative from the SRC Zimbabwe, and this example gives a good insight into some of the tangible results and behaviour change that can be achieved through Kicking AIDS Out! activities.

### **Respect life – Respect your self**

Right to Play<sup>12</sup> identifies Self Esteem as one of the life skills in their “Live Safe’ Play Safe” Program, and defines this further as: Self acceptance, Self confidence, Self worth, Self value, Self Respect. If you don’t respect yourself, you won’t respect the lives of others and want to protect them and yourself. Sport can give youth experiences that raise their self-esteem and improve the respect for your teammates and opponents. At the same time, they learn facts about HIV/AIDS that makes them able to help fight stigma and discrimination.

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<sup>11</sup> Feasibility study on sport and HIV/AIDS, Commissioned by the Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (unpublished, 2003)

<sup>12</sup> Live Safe, Play Safe Program. Right to Play manual for Play Safe Coaches (unpublished).

In SCORE, the involvement of people living with HIV/AIDS has been a very positive contribution towards the education of our volunteers and in events, where different individuals have given motivational speeches or been part of the activities.

It is important for children and youth to experience different roles and responsibilities within the group or team. Being in charge of the warm-up in a session or blowing the whistle as a referee helps them see the importance of leadership, teamwork and communication, and these issues can also be part of a discussion around life challenges and life skills.



*Photo: Stefan Howells, 2001*

### **Go girl!**

Empowering female role models in sport like referees and coaches plays an important role in the work of the different organisations, and Kicking AIDS Out! is a good tool in these processes. This also came out as a recommendation through the previously mentioned feasibility study<sup>13</sup>: "It is important to design activities in ways that enable girls to participate, and to work especially to foster female leaders and coaches", and another recommendation that states that "The sports organisation must enforce a zero tolerance of sexual abuse linked to sports activities, to make sports arenas safe places from exploitation."

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<sup>13</sup> See footnote 11

If we start at the sports field, attitudes can be taken into other life situations. Communication is the key to an open relationship, and assertiveness and respect go together in good communication. In sport, girls can learn to stand up for themselves; boys can learn to listen to girls and see that they can take on important roles.

### **Body language**

Sport and physical activity is all about using your body and exploring its possible improvement. If you know your own body well, you will want to know how to protect it. Sport can show you how the body works and what happens when it is sick or injured. Right to Play states again under “Look after Yourself, look after One Another”<sup>14</sup>: “All children need to learn that they have some control over their bodies, and that the choices they make and actions they take will affect their health. Girls, in particular, need to learn that their bodies can be self-controlled, and do not belong to others. The essence of body wisdom is clear in sport: respect for the body, for its beauty, its ability, and its potential.”

Knowing how to keep your self fit and how to treat injuries is an important part of physical education and sport leadership. This knowledge not only helps the youth understand how they can protect themselves in sport, but also how physical activity is an essential part of caring for yourself if you are infected with HIV.

### **Me and my community**

Caring for the environment is another aspect, which is built into the programs of some of the organisations. In MYSA<sup>15</sup>, which operates in the slums of Mathare outside Nairobi, soccer teams can earn extra points in the league for cleaning up their communities on a weekly basis. In this way, they learn how to stay healthy through sport but also how the surroundings play an important role in health and hygiene. They learn to respect themselves, but also to respect their community, the place where they live.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.righttoplay.com>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.mysakenya.org>

## **Peer Leadership**

Many of the organizations of the Kicking AIDS Out! Network use the concept of peer leadership in their approach towards youth. Youth listen to youth. Sex is known as a taboo issue in many African cultures, and young people all over the world find it difficult to discuss sex related questions with adults. Sport creates an arena where youth come together to have fun, but also to talk about things that are important to them. Through movement games and other activities, Kicking AIDS Out! helps bringing up different issues for discussion in a safe environment. Peer leaders can help facilitate these discussions, or just be there for individuals if they need to talk to someone they trust. As an example, EDUSPORT in Zambia has developed a system of peer leadership where young players are given HIV/AIDS and leadership training, and the responsibility to build up their own team of younger players with whom they run Kicking AIDS Out! activities. In 2002<sup>16</sup>, EDUSPORT had 128 Peer Coaches between the age of 13 and 19, of whom 60% are female.

## **THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP**

The organisations of the Kicking AIDS Out! Network are all sport organisations, which means they are not and do not intend to be HIV/AIDS experts. Leaders who work with Kicking AIDS Out! need to know their community well; they need to know what services exist like support groups, HIV testing facilities and clinics and counselling services. In this way, they can maintain their role as a sport leader and refer their peers correctly when they need more specific help. It is important for sports organisations to cooperate with other non-sports partners in order to ensure a holistic approach, and that we do not contribute to the spread of new myths or false messages.

The provincial teams in SCORE build their own networks with local governmental structures and other NGOs. As an example, the SCORE Mpumalanga team has started a Sport and HIV/AIDS Forum, where several organisations working with youth and HIV/AIDS exchange experiences and expertise, and organise events together.

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<sup>16</sup> See footnote 11

The children and youth of Kicking AIDS Out! organisations reach out to also build their own partnerships. Each year in July/August, local soccer teams from communities where SCORE and its Kicking AIDS Out! partners work, participated in the Norway Cup<sup>17</sup> in Oslo where they played against teams from around the whole world.

The matches were important, but perhaps the most memorable experience was when they were linked up with a Norwegian ambassador team. These teams supported each other during matches, did educational “patrols” together to spread information, exchanged cultural performances and spent a week together after the Norway Cup – the African team being hosted by the Norwegian team in their community.

Most of these teams have continued playing a role as Kicking AIDS Out! Ambassadors after their return, and make a particularly strong impression on their peers back in their own communities.



*South African and Norwegian ambassador teams dancing together at the Norway Cup 2003*

*(Photo: Sverre Aarsand, July 2003)*

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.norway-cup.no> See footnote 2)

## THE WAY FORWARD

In June 2001, the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS stated as one of their global priorities, “by 2005, to ensure that at least 90% of young people aged 15-24 have access to information, education and services necessary to develop the life skills needed to reduce their vulnerability to HIV, and 95% by 2010”<sup>18</sup>.

Kicking AIDS Out! represents an innovative approach towards reaching this goal. The challenge lies in proving that it is different and that it does make an impact on the lives of young people. This will be a focus for the Kicking AIDS Out! Network in the coming year, alongside with the ongoing implementation of the existing programs. The Research Working Group is conducting a study to measure the impact of the Kicking AIDS Out! programs.

The Workgroup on Program Development is currently working on developing a uniform training model for Kicking AIDS Out! leaders, based on the existing material from all organisations. In January 2004, the new program for training of Kicking AIDS Out! Leaders and Peer Leaders will be ready for piloting in at least seven different countries in southern Africa. This is a unique attempt to get a uniform approach towards improving the quality of the program in all the implementing organisations of the Network.

But, while we are looking into the impacts of Kicking AIDS Out! specifically, thousands of youth across the region are also being exposed to sporting opportunities and given a chance to build their own capacities through physical activities that help them stay healthy and give them space to discover their own goals.

The initiatives brought together by this Network are using sport and recreation to change lives. The training and activity programs assist in addressing the pandemic of HIV/AIDS and will contribute towards decreasing the devastating impact of this disease. But

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<sup>18</sup> Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS): Report on the global HIV/AIDS epidemic. 2002

Kicking AIDS Out! is also about building a future beyond HIV/AIDS, and this is an even more important goal. Out on the dusty playing fields of disadvantaged and marginalised communities in southern Africa young people are taking control of their own destinies.

Through sport they are inspired and driven not only to fight AIDS, and not only to support those that are infected and affected by the pandemic, but to effect real transformation through empowering themselves and those around them. Northern and southern partner organisations are working together through the Kicking AIDS Out! Network to achieve this - and this is what really holds the promise of a brighter future.



Photo: Andrew Purnell, June 2003

**Fight AIDS – not people with AIDS!**

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