



Report

ICASA Youth Program

27th Nov - 4th Dec 2015

Harare, Zimbabwe



The ICASA Youth Program is part of the official ICASA proceedings.
This report details proceedings and youth engagement throughout.



Disclaimer:

The views and opinions of this report do not reflect policy or positions of the supporters and sponsors of the 2015 ICASA Youth Program.

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2015 ICASA YouthFront Sponsors



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Développement Sans Frontières



Background and Introduction

Africa's young population is the youngest ever seen in history, making it the youngest region in the world. Young people below 18 years of age make up more than half of the population in Sub Saharan Africa. According to the 2012 Africa Economic Outlook, this population keeps growing and expected to have doubled by 2045. The Population Reference Bureau, in a 2010 report on young people and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emphasizes that young people have tremendous potential to grow stable economies, eradicate health and educational disparities, and improve gender equality. However, young people today exist in a context of high unemployment, wealth inequality, rapid urbanization, civil and political upheaval, and discrimination (such as gender, racial, xenophobic and homophobic).

The focus on young people is critical to the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA). Since 2005, the ICASA YouthFront has convened a Youth Program of the conference. The program has performed a leadership function, providing young people with the skills and platform to analyze emerging issues and areas of engagement in the main conference programme. The space also has also provided young people with a voice on their issues and priorities. Estimates indicate that more than 1,400 young people have been reached directly by the efforts and messaging of the YouthFront, whilst over 100,000 reached indirectly through old and new media communication channels.

The 2015 ICASA Youth Program sought to bring issues important to young people in the Post 2015 agenda process to the fore, as Africa and the world gauged progress in addressing the AIDS pandemic. The 2015 Youth Program theme was **"The 2030 Agenda: Delivering for Young People in the Post 2015 Era"**. The theme was sourced from 149 youth contributions through a three (3) week long online consultation.

Specifically, the program sought to focus on three (3) key thematic areas namely;

1. Innovate,
2. Impact and
3. Accelerate.

Innovate because it is critical for young people to be at the centre of innovation- that scientific advances, innovative ideas and new prevention technologies are unlocking improvements in disease prevention, treatment and care.

Accelerate because an important investment to the achievement of the new Sustainable Development Goals will be through prioritizing young people at all levels and ensuring their engagement.

And finally, Impact because we must have smart, effective health investments, expanding opportunity and achieving greater social justice for young people everywhere.

The aim of this report is to provide a narrative summary of the proceedings of the 18th ICASA Youth Program, showcasing key activities by young people and providing analysis on the YouthFront deliverables. It will highlight the key milestones in the implementation of the youth program – from the selection of participants, running the program (youth pre-conference and pavilion activities) and expected activities beyond ICASA 2015.

Goal and Objectives

The goal of the youth program was to “Increase the capacity of young people to develop, introduce, implement and advocate for effective, evidence-based informed by the SDGs and clarifying the role of young people moving forward”. To deliver on this aspiration, the youth program sought to deliver on the following areas;

- a) Provide a space for young people to examine ICASA’s substantive program and strategize on opportunities for engagement,
- b) Provide a platform for young people in the main conference to discuss, share knowledge and lessons, and facilitate inter-generational dialogue on efforts to address the AIDS pandemic,
- c) Maintain a strong communication function, sharing information on youth issues at the conference, including activities in the youth pavilion and youth engagement across the event and strategies beyond.
- d) Provide a platform for young people to strategize around the SDGs and plan youth interaction with the new development goals

Strategy

The ICASA YouthFront has garnered a wealth of lessons in its decade long existence working alongside ICASA. These lessons have helped shape the program through a dedicated system and a set of tools to assist the secretariat and overall organizing team. Critical to the team to ensure that young people engaged in shaping the program before the conference; that during the conference, they would take center stage and lead sessions and shape the narrative; and after the conference, they would use the experiences, knowledge and skills gained to shape interventions on the ground.



Implementing the Strategy

Before

The YouthFront utilized the connectivity power of social media to mass source ideas and substantive contributions that shaped the overall youth programme. This included the 2015 communication & branding; the youth pre-conference and pavilion programs; the theme of the youth program and expressions of interest to host sessions throughout the program.

Social media platforms, predominantly Facebook and Twitter, and the ICASA YouthFront website helped collate and share the information and facilitate engagement. During this consultative stage, young people from across Africa were also given an opportunity to submit articles, fact sheets and research findings to popularize issues and program activities in their communities that showcase youth engagement, leadership, innovation, impact and a need to invest in young people to accelerate development.

During

The flagship event for the YouthFront was the ICASA Youth Pre-Conference, which brought together over 210 young people to learn, share and strategize for the main conference. More than 90% of all sessions were all sourced and led by young people who submitted concepts/abstracts before the conference. This was a key element of the experience and lessons from previous ICASA Youth Programs. At the ICASA main conference, the YouthFront coordinated a space called the “Youth Pavilion”, which was part of the community village. Here, young people could meet to strategize, hold discussions, dialogue with adults and leaders attending the conference, share information and materials, and showcase their programmes and activities.

Borrowing from previous editions, the activities and sessions at the pavilion sought to strike a careful balance between creating visibility of youth and their issues throughout the conference in a way that enhances as opposed to diminishing their participation in all other aspects of the conference. Additionally, the YouthFront supported young people who had been selected to make various presentations during the main conference. This was to ensure that these presentations, whilst building on the work and experiences of the various presenters and their organisations, also factored in the thoughts and reflections of the broader youth community at the conference.



After

As with previous youth programs, the thrust is to ensure that the conversations that began at the conference translate into local level action and tangible results that young people can commit to and follow up on together with their peers. Moving forward, the YouthFront is committed to a continuity of action, by firstly giving participants an opportunity to share key lessons and experiences from the conference. The YouthFront will also go on to dedicate a platform on its website for social networking and dialogue and will ensure active flow of information by ensuring young people across the continent have an avenue with which to share information whilst playing their role in the fight against AIDS.

In the months beyond ICASA 2015, the YouthFront will dedicate its spaces to communicate progress in the 2030 Agenda implementation, including the SDGs. It will as well focus on the upcoming United Nations High Level Event on HIV/AIDS, the International AIDS Conference and other processes in the 2030 Agenda calendar. This will ensure there is a continued presence of the voices from Harare, Zimbabwe and previous ICASA Youth Programs. One such activity to be hosted in partnership with the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative is the “Love in a time of HIV” social media campaign to encourage prevention discussion among young people around the valentines’ celebration.

Proceedings

Youth Pre-Conference

The ICASA Youth Pre-Conference took place at the Zimbali Conference Centre from the 27th to 28th November 2016. The Pre-Conference was launched with statements from Annah Sango, a Youth Activist from Zimbabwe; Dr. Ihab Ahmed Abdelrahman, President of the 18th ICASA; Mr. Luc Bodea, ICASA Director and Prof. Hubert Gijzen, Director of UNESCO Jakarta Office.

The theme of the Youth Pre-Conference was “2030 Agenda: Delivering for Young People in the Post 2015 Era”. Sessions at the Pre-Conference examined a number of issues – from the status of young people in the new Sustainable Development Agenda and why there is a need to invest in harnessing the demographic dividend; country experiences on issues such as the age of consent in service delivery; and ‘vaccinology’ – to issues of access to services, reproductive health commodities and working with vulnerable groups and communities.

During the two days of discussions, young people brainstormed and collated ideas, opinions and recommendations that informed the outcome statement at the closing of the Youth Pre-Conference. In the statement, young people opted to be the ones making commitments instead of calling for action from their leaders, making for an exciting shift in the focus of the Youth Program’s statement. Together with sessions from participants, key partners delivered presentations. These included the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), Stop AIDS Now, HIVOS and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). An outcome statement was developed following the preconference to capture the lessons and the commitments of the young people to take forward. This outcome was subsequently presented at the main conference and the youth press conference, the plenary and the closing ceremony of the conference.

Youth Pavilion

The Youth Pavilion is another flagship component of the YouthFront-led ICASA Youth Program. It has become a regular feature and consistently provides a space for young people to learn, share and network during the main conference. It is usually a place where they can get information on various sessions focused on youth or featuring youth speakers.

At the 18th ICASA, the YouthFront sought to ensure there were the pavilion provided the quantity and quality of youth led and oriented sessions at the main conference. It also served as an opportunity select abstracts submitted by young people who did not get a place in the main conference to present and engage their peers. It created a lot of visibility for the key messages coming out of the youth pre-conference, including the outcome statement and the thrust of youth commitments.

The pavilion was inaugurated by the Uganda State Minister for Primary Care, Sarah Achieng Opendi. The officiating ceremony was also attended by the President of the 2016 ICASA, Dr Ihab Ahmed Abdelrahman; the UNFPA Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office Director, Dr. Julita Onabanjo; Professor Sheila Dinotshe Tlou, the Director of the UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Eastern and Southern Africa and the Minister of Health – Zimbabwe, Dr Parirenyatwa.

Some of the high level speakers at the Pavilion included Michelle Sidibe, the UNAIDS Executive Director and Luc Bodea, the 2016 ICASA Director.



Main Conference Participation

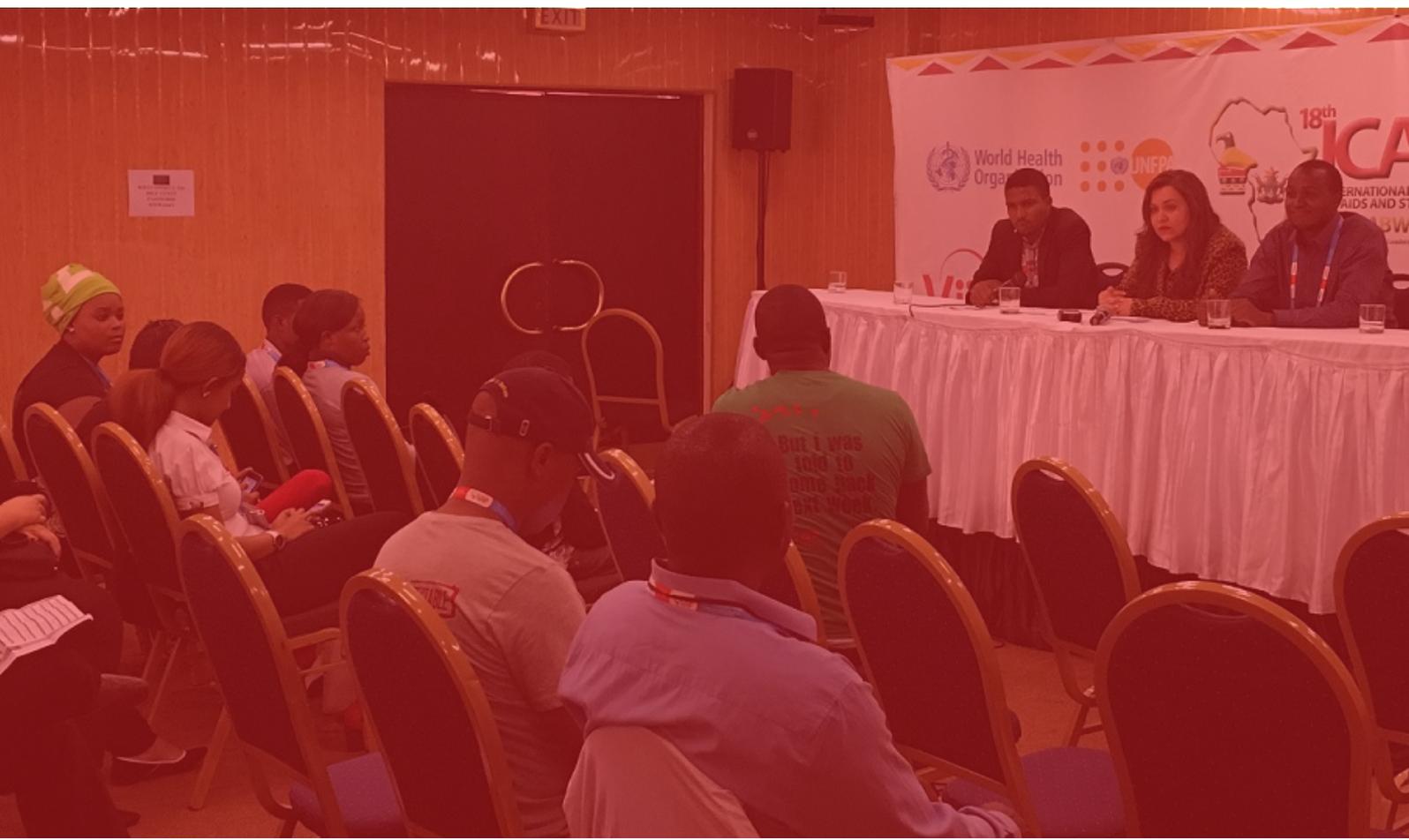
For another occasion, the YouthFront successfully secured leadership roles in the conference and had representation in all statutory planning committees. This ensured that key youth issues were actively championed in the planning processes and youth speakers given the opportunity/considered for speaking roles in the main conference program.

With this level of participation, the Youth Program ensured that not only advocacy issues in AIDS prevention interventions would be discussed, but also scientific issues were allocated time in the agenda and friendly speakers would engage young people in these areas. This was done to increase youth interest in the scientific aspect of the AIDS response. Overall, 24 youth speakers in both the plenary and special session events were recorded.

Press Conference

The Youth Pre-Conference is another key item of the youth program. It remains critical in sharing the results and recommendations of participants in the youth pre-conferences. While different media outlets and platforms were used to disseminate information regarding the pre-conference outcomes, the team carried the tradition of organizing a press conference with local and international media at the conference. This is critical in reaching stakeholders across the host country and beyond.

The press conference format included brief statements from the three speakers, selected by the Youth Pre-Conference. Following the statements, the speakers delivered the Outcome Statement and this was followed by plenary session for questions. While the speakers emphasized that not only must young people be a critical element of SDGs implementation, but participants also challenged youth leaders attending the conference to ensure they share information and experiences with young people in their countries and communities. The commitments made would not make sense if they are not shared widely. A copy of the statement is appended at the end of this report.





Next Steps

ICASA 2015 has outlined a number of learnings to take forward in the outcome statement presented. Aside that, we will:

1. Lead campaigns to disseminate information with young people who could not attend the conference
2. Encourage youth dialogue around prevention
3. Engage actively in the integration of SDGs in local program planning and implementation
4. Promote safe spaces for young people to lead the agenda in protecting their future

Support from Partners

The 2015 ICASA Youth Program, hosted by the YouthFront appreciates and recognizes the inputs and support of all the partners who made this convening possible. The support received included financial, in-kind and technical support. The Youth Program received support UNESCO, UNFPA, IAVI, Stop AIDS Now, HIVOS and Host Tanzania.

Particular recognition is given to the YouthFront team of organizations, including the Global Youth Coalition on AIDS (GYCA), Curious Minds Ghana; AfriYAN; African Young Positives; Students and Youth Working on Reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT), SafAIDS and the United Nations Association (UNA) of Tanzania.

Towards 2017 ICASA

The ICASA YouthFront plans for follow-up activities towards 2017 ICASA that builds on experiences from previous years. Beginning early 2016, the YouthFront will collect and publish experiences from participants from the conference to highlight key lessons. In addition, the YouthFront will continue promoting subject areas that participants highlighted in the evaluation as needing regular updates on. These included New Prevention Technologies and the Post 2015 Agenda.

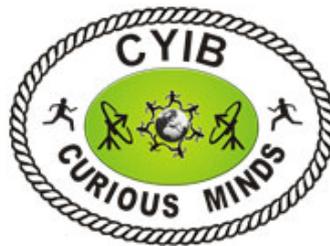
The online community will also be revamped to reflect the growing needs for a one stop shop for engagement and information sharing that has sustained presence. The YouthFront will device means to provide opportunities for as many young people as possible to share their voices through its platforms.

About the ICASA YouthFront

The ICASA YouthFront is a coalition of youth serving organizations working on HIV and AIDS and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of young people in Africa. The core mandate of the YouthFront was to ensure effective and active participation of young people in the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA).

The YouthFront was responsible for organizing the youth program for the conference thus ensuring young people have speaking roles, understand the sessions and can make meaningful contributions, include youth issues in the conference program and outcomes, lead advocacy campaigns on various issues which are of importance to the young people on the African Continent.

The YouthFront has been in existence since 2005 where it played a major role in supporting the conference organize the youth program for ICASA. The YouthFront went on to organize the youth program for ICASA 2008 in Dakar, Senegal, 2011 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and 2013 in Capetown, South Africa. Seven youth led and serving organizations spearheaded the YouthFront in organizing the youth program for the 2015 ICASA 2013 in Harare, Zimbabwe. These included Global Youth Coalition on AIDS (GYCA) Africa, Curious Minds Ghana; AfriYAN; African Young Positives; Students and Youth Working on Reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT), SafAIDS and the United Nations Association (UNA) of Tanzania.



2015 ICASA Youth Program Outcome Statement

We young people at the ICASA YouthFront organized Pre-Conference for the 18th International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa, held on the 27th and 28th of November 2015 at the Zimbali Conference Centre, in Harare, Zimbabwe, under the theme 'Agenda 2030: Delivering for Youth in the Post 2015 Era'.

Having noted the tremendous progress in the HIV response in Africa, curtailed with notable challenges in access to comprehensive HIV and SRHR services and effects of HIV on our continent, where AIDS is now the number one cause of adolescent deaths, and disproportionately affecting our young girls and women, as the future generation and young people of Africa therefore, we commit to,

- **Advocate** for the review of punitive and conflicting laws, policies and legal frameworks that impede access to HIV and SRHR services for all - leaving no one behind - including age of consent in our respective countries.
- **Influence** governments to invest in research and development targeted at new prevention technologies that work for adolescents and young people including Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).
- **Push for** establishment of an Africa youth taskforce for prevention research and development.
- **Engage** governments on the the need to increase financing for health including increasing domestic financing for the HIV response and reproductive health commodities.
- **Strengthen** and support structures for young people living with HIV to own the HIV response. Be part of HIV and SRHR policy making processes, implementation and evaluation ensuring meaningful youth participation and accountability including in institutional processes such as the Global Fund.
- **Lead** country level actions to advocate for the delivery of Comprehensive Sexuality Education.
- **Invest** in efforts to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs framework, including the commitment to End of AIDS by 2030.
- **Increase** our engagement with existing funding and program opportunities like the Global Fund, All in!, DREAMS, Every Woman Every Child.
- **Support** fellow young people to dispel myths and disinformation which drive stigma and fuel discrimination. Further ensuring that the human rights and dignity of every adolescent and young person are protected, promoted and fulfilled, without distinction of any kind.
- **Commit to** increased engagement and advocacy with our governments, regional economic communities, the African Union, United Nations agencies and other civil society groups to accelerate efforts towards the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly targets related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, ending AIDS, investing in education and raising awareness among policy makers and other stakeholders on the importance of the demographic dividend towards the sustainable development of Africa.

Presented on 28th November 2015 at the closing plenary of the ICASA Youth Pre-Conference.

2015 ICASA YouthFront Steering Committee



More Information

For more information on the 2015 ICASA Youth Program, please visit the ICASA YouthFront website via www.icasayouthfront.org. Click here to view a detailed **day to day program** and click here for a **list of all speakers**.



Innovate | Impact | Accelerate,