

SUCCESS STORY

National Youth Week Celebration in Singida focuses on HIV Prevention and Economic Opportunity

Youth engaged in sports and cultural activities as an innovative means of learning how to protect themselves from HIV at FHI's Ishi Campaign events.



FHI/Ishi Campaign Manager, Astronaut Bagile (left), briefs President and First Lady Mkapa on work the Campaign has been doing in Tanzania.

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With support from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, through USAID/Tanzania, Family Health International's Ishi Campaign, together with local government officials and community organizations, conducted a week of activities in Singida Region as part of the National Youth Week celebration, held in Singida 8 to 14 October 2005. The Ishi events were complemented by the Small Industry Development Organization's zonal week exhibition and the climax of the 2005 Uhuru Torch Race activities, both part of the Youth Week celebration. Ishi's activities were designed to educate youth about HIV prevention, with particular emphasis on the abstinence and faithfulness prevention strategies.

One morning session brought together youth and parents to conduct a youth-parent dialogue. Thirty-three youth and 16 parents attended the talk. Discussions that at times became heated revealed to both parents and youth where their communications begin to break down. Participants discussed some of the barriers to communication that exist between youth and parents and how these barriers can be overcome. Both groups agreed that they need to break the silence around sexual and reproductive health issues, which are considered taboo. The parents acknowledged that they need to educate themselves on issues of HIV and reproductive health so that they can better discuss such issues with their children. Both sides learned a lot from these discussions and expressed a desire to make changes in their own households.

A series of sports events and cultural performances were organized throughout the week. Other activities included dancing competitions, beauty contests, a bicycle competition for men and women, rap competitions, and music performances with both traditional music and the popular *bongo flavor* rap music. HIV prevention messages were intermixed into these performances, reaching the thousands that attend the events each day.

The "Miss Ishi Asilia" (*The Original Miss Ishi*) beauty contest provided a unique opportunity to integrate education with entertainment. The contest attracted 5,800 viewers and was aimed at promoting Tanzanian values. Each of the nine beauty contestants was given the opportunity to pass on information about HIV/AIDS to the watching crowd. The winning girl, judged on her ability to educate her peers about HIV/AIDS, was awarded a sewing machine so that she can start on a new life of self-reliance and have more power over decisions made that will affect her life.

The rap competitions (one for in-school and one for out-of-school youth) turned out to be one of the most popular and engaging events. Youth groups composed rap songs that discouraged risky behavior and urged their peers to join efforts to



Children participate in a dance competition, one of the many activities organized by FHI's Ishi Campaign during the youth festival. These competitions integrated educational messages about HIV prevention into fun community activities.

“As youth we feel shy to speak with our parents about relationships, sex, and HIV related matters. By breaking the silence on issues that are considered taboo we can overcome these barriers to communication.”

-Youth participant In the Ishi Campaign's Parent-Youth Discussion Group

combat HIV/AIDS. A total of 11 camps (informal youth groups) entered songs into the competitions. The competitions, which consisted of each group performing their song, attracted a total of 5,300 participants, including 4,200 youth.

There were also opportunities for the crowd to participate and interact during the festivities. In between performances, simple questions about HIV prevention, abstinence, and faithfulness were thrown out to the crowd, and those who answered correctly were awarded prizes such as T-shirts containing educational messages. Throughout these activities the crowd was reminded to visit the Ishi pavilion, where one-to-one educational sessions were taking place and referrals to VCT and other services were being conducted.

The strong turnout for the activities demonstrated the tremendous interest in HIV prevention activities among youth and other community members in Singida. During the week daily, turnout varied from 1,700 to nearly 8,000 people, mostly youth. On the final day of the festivities an estimated 15,000 people turned out to participate.

This successful youth festival was part of the national week to honor the first president of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. The theme for this year's week, "Let's protect women and girls against HIV/AIDS," provided a perfect backdrop for the festival. The theme was included in the discussions and performances that took place throughout the week, as well as in specialized sessions such as the Girls Power Conference, which brought together almost 60 girls to speak with women role models, and to discuss ways to empower and protect themselves. Through the creative outreach activities used by Ishi, there was substantially more active participation of girls in this event than in previous youth festivals.

In an expression of appreciation for the Ishi events, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mr. Benjamin William Mkapa, visited the Ishi pavilion at the exhibition grounds. The Ishi Campaign manager briefed President Mkapa on the Campaign's contribution to the fight against HIV/AIDS among young Tanzanians. "Good job, let me shake your hands," President Mkapa said as he greeted Ishi's Youth Advisory Group members on his way out of the pavilion.

