

# 2009

Biology: Set 3

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## **[ INFECTIOUS DISEASE PROJECT ]**

Write-up: A proposal for funding to The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

### *Identify the specific group you want to target:*

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Africa makes up over 12% of the world's population, but with more than 60% of the AIDS-infected population ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS\\_in\\_Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AIDS_in_Africa)), it is no surprise that this beloved continent is in dire need of the assistance of both internal and external support systems. Of this staggering number of HIV infected people, the majority lie between the ages of 15-49 (<http://www.avert.org/aafrica.htm>), but the rest are no exception. Everyone is at risk.

Adolescents, from Africa in particular, are a highly affected population, as this stage of development primarily revolves around experimenting and exploring – be it with drugs, alcohol or sexual behaviour. Therefore, with sexual curiosity at its peak, it is important to tackle the issue of safe sex and discuss possible risks and consequences as early as possible. Both male and female adolescents face physical, psychological, financial and social difficulties on a daily basis, many of which put them at great risk of contracting HIV/Aids or other sexually transmitted diseases.

### *Give a rationale for why you chose this group:*

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Teenage females appear vulnerable to the public eye and therefore become “easy” victims of rape by lustful, HIV infected men – some of whom even believe the myth that “having sex with a virgin will cure HIV/Aids”. Additionally, it is a known fact that 8 out of 10 African women do not make use of any birth control methods (according to Africa Flak blog), which further increases the prevalence level of HIV/Aids and teenage pregnancy. This leads to more young women procuring abortions – nearly 5 million abortions per year in Africa alone – otherwise becoming single teenage mothers infected with HIV. These women need the support from family members, as well as from the father of the child. They also require treatment to prevent their unborn baby from be contracting the disease. However, this is not the case in many of the poverty stricken areas in African countries. Instead, these adolescent women become outcasts and are left alone to raise their children with the limited resources they have.

Adolescent men have tough challenges to overcome too, as it is they who are expected to carry condoms wherever they go; who – in some cases – find it easier to sleep with multiple partners; who can shamelessly “disappear” after impregnating a woman; who can simply rape a woman when the urge to have sex arises, and who have big egos preventing them from having HIV-tests done. However, these are the same men who are forced or voluntarily have sex with other men; who are expected to be circumcised and clean before engaging in sex, and who eventually become truck drivers due to the lack of education, hence spreading the dreadful disease through prostitutes while on the road. If provided with sufficient education or information, the spread of HIV/Aids will decrease because they will be more aware of the consequences that they may face if their lifestyles do not change.

***Describe your proposed solution:***

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I propose that a monthly magazine/booklet be published, called *VFC – Virus Free Community*. It will include the different aspects surrounding sexually transmitted infections and HIV/Aids and will provide general information about the diseases and, highlighting the most common problems faced by adolescents in Africa. The sections in *VFC* will be divided and will comprise of important information, statistics, solutions, personal stories, etc.

Section 1 – *Skin deep*: This section will include the basic information about the biological processes of the development of HIV to Aids, providing people with in depth knowledge which they may or may not already know. It may even stimulate the minds of people, who then formulate suggestions or plans for treatments and cures. Simple illustrations will be included to help readers better understand the biological terminology and overall concept.

Section 2 – *Cover-up*: Information about contraceptive methods will be provided: the various types for men and women (condoms, birth control pills, etc), the importance of using them, the effectiveness rating, which brands are preferred over others, demonstrations of how the contraceptives are used. Along with this, graphic pictures of infected genital areas or weak, thin Aids victims will be included to show readers the severity of STI's and the devastating outcomes once someone contracts Aids. This becomes a visual stimulus and will remain with the readers, cautioning them when engaging in sexual contact with someone who possesses these symptoms.

Section 3 – *Embracing my status*: This will be a platform for people to share their personal stories, or any ideas that they may have to combat sexually transmitted diseases. Readers will be able to contact the magazine editors via email or by letters and a number of different stories will be published each month. This is meant to encourage readers to have the necessary blood tests done and to know their HIV status. Additionally, this section will serve as a guide for those already infected with HIV and/or Aids, as it will display the wonderful and creative innovations, such as artwork, fashion designs, etc., that other infected people have developed in order to create awareness. This is also meant to motivate HIV infected Africans and inspire them to make the most of their lives and even generate an income, regardless of their disease.

***Explain why you think this solution will be effective:***

Despite the media's exhaustive attempts to educate the world about HIV/Aids, one of the main reasons why many African people still remain ignorant about this deadly killer is due to the lack of resources and exposure. It is true that the internet is overflowing with an abundance of information about HIV/Aids, but according to Internet World Stat (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>), out of the estimated 9.7 million Africans, only 5.6% have internet access. So what about the other 94.4%? What forms of media or education are they receiving? VFC will not only be distributed to all communities for free, but the illustrations will also prove handy to those with reading difficulties or who are illiterate. It will become popular amongst adolescents who already subscribe to magazines and will become a handbook and guide for those who need references or first hand opinions/suggestions.

***State what resources would be required to put this solution into action:***

The finances required for this project primarily cover the salaries of employees, as no money will be gained through sales. Also, printing buildings will be needed (either built or bought), plus equipment such as printers, paper, etc should be provided to each printing company in order to create the actual booklet. VFC will launch in very few African countries at first and will then branch out across the continent and possibly even globally. This will

require more journalists, photographers and other staff to capture unique stories and photos of people who want to air the opinions, as well as the permission from distributors, such as schools, hospitals, clinics, government organisations or supermarkets.