Youth, HIV/AIDS
and Social Transformations in Africa
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Monograph Series

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Youth, HIV/AIDS
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Donald Anthony Mwiturubani
Ayalew Gebre
Margarida Paulo
Rekopantswe Mate
Antoine Socpa

Monograph Series

The CODESRIA Monograph Series is published to stimulate debate, comments, and further research on the subjects covered. The series serve as a forum for works based on the findings of original research, which however are too long for academic journals but not long enough to be published as books, and which deserve to be accessible to the research community in Africa and elsewhere. Such works are usually case studies, theoretical debates or both, but they also incorporate significant findings, analyses and critical evaluations of the current literature on the subjects covered.
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Preface

The five research reports that constitute this monograph are a fruit of the collaboration between the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) of the USA, two institutions with a longstanding interest in the study of youth and social transformations in Africa. Under the collaboration, 12 young African researchers were able to benefit from fellowships, workshops and the expertise of resource persons, to pursue research on Youth, HIV/AIDS, and Social Transformation.

In Tanzania where high-risk sexual behaviour is common among youths and decreases with increasing levels of education, Anthony Mwiturubani stresses the importance of education for and challenges of accessing and putting HIV/AIDS related information and skills into practice. He argues that Tanzanian youth, although generally aware of the HIV/AIDS problem and preventive measures, lack a forum in which to express their perceptions and feelings on these issues. The tendency is for adults to impose ideas and decisions on the youth, regardless of the fact that youths and adults have different attitudes, opinions, perceptions and responses to these issues. His study is thus critical of knowledge dissemination practices that do not give youths an opportunity effectively to participate in their design and implementation. He argues for policy makers and planners to understand the context in which youth come to maturity and engage as adults in society.

Gebre focuses on youth in Addis Ababa, mapping how HIV/AIDS prevalence and infection rates appear to decline with age. Primarily and severely affected are the most energetic and productive segments of the population who bear the brunt of the epidemic, a situation which in turn highlights the pivotal role of youth in processes of social transformation. Also discussed is the centrality of heterosexual relations in the transmission of HIV/AIDS, resulting in the proliferation of AIDS orphans. The reality of heterosexual relations is equally at the base of the Ethiopian Government's HIV/AIDS policy, that is geared towards the implementation of preventive programmes and the provision of rehabilitative services for the infected and affected. Within the government's policy framework, Gebre identifies the felt care and support needs of youth living with HIV/AIDS and of AIDS orphans. In addition, he provides a profile of the care and support networks in Addis Ababa, and the challenges that beneficiaries encounter in their attempt to access these services.
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Paulo studies the young residents of Mafalala Barrio in Maputo in contribution towards an improved understanding of youth and sexuality in Mozambique, as well as to finding ways of helping HIV/AIDS educational programmes in their intervention endeavours. She calls for a critical rethink of current methods of and assumptions about educational programmes, especially in a context where these very methods and assumptions are failing to curb the rise in HIV/AIDS infections. Paulo points to various socio-cultural factors as key to understanding the perception of sexuality among young people and reason for their ambivalence vis-à-vis messages inviting them to practise ‘safe sex’.

On her part, Rekopantswe Mate examines discourses of youth sexuality in rural Zimbabwe from the perspectives of parents, guardians and the youth themselves. She argues that in a bid to be with the world, female youth in Zimbabwe deploy their sexuality and femininity to access modern goods such as biscuits, fizzy drinks, and perfumed lotions, in a context in which they are otherwise marginalised and where these commodities are not accessible. To her, the means by which youth access these commodities constitute a reworking of prevailing local norms of dating and understandings of proper male and female roles leading to social-sexual exchanges between men and women of different ages. The obvious socioeconomic inequalities between the parties limit possibilities of the use of condoms in spite of knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Also, the gendered needs of either party (for men, the quest for sex with young women symbolises virility, spending symbolises economic prowess, and the search for marriageable partners; for women: the need for goods and services accessible with money they do not have and also the search for marriageable partners) seem to make it impossible for safe sex to be practised.

Drawing on his study of Cameroon, Socpa underscores culture as key to understanding the health situation of any community, and as a major influence on the sexual behaviour of individuals and responses towards messages on HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care for the infected or affected. He gives a critical overview of the relevance and limitations of cultural explanations of HIV/AIDS, drawing both on existing literature, and on qualitative data based on studies of the Centre and North provinces of Cameroon.

While still very much work in progress, these studies contribute significant empirical data from five different countries to ongoing debates on how youth and social processes in Africa shape and are shaped by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Adebayo Olukoshi
Executive Secretary