

## Chapter 25

# Young voices travel far: a case study of *Scenarios* from Africa

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**One night** as twenty-year-old Olga Kiswendsida Ouédraogo from Burkina Faso was leaving the office building in Ouagadougou where she was working as an intern, she heard the security guards, stationed at the entrance to the compound, laughing uproariously. As she approached their guard post, she saw they were watching a tiny television set perched precariously on a shelf. The door guards were not known for their sense of humour and Olga's curiosity was piqued, so she stopped in the shadows to observe. "I was astounded to see that they were watching my film"<sup>1</sup>.

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Olga's film is a short fiction film, a little over two minutes in length, called "The Shop" ("La Boutique"). It started life as an idea she thought up for a scriptwriting competition, which had served as a pretext for her to take some time off revision for her final school-leaving exams. The film is about a young man whose girlfriend, at a moment of nascent passion, discovers that he's forgotten to buy condoms and sends him to the corner shop to buy some. Intimidated by the other customers, he buys packet after packet of biscuits until, finally, other customers show him the way, including an old man who comes in asking for condoms for his fourth wife. The last scene shows the young man running home, laden with condoms and biscuits, just in time to see his girlfriend ride off on her moped yelling "It's too late!"<sup>2</sup>.

1 Olga Kiswendsida Ouédraogo, personal conversation, January 2004.

2 The *Scenarios* films can be viewed in English online with a high speed Internet connection at <<http://www.globaldialogues.org/Films.htm>>.

Olga says that hearing the laughter of the “stoic” security guards as they watched her film was the “greatest reward I could have had”. People react to “The Shop” with similar hilarity all around the world. It seems that the young man’s embarrassment strikes a universal human chord. The film is available in at least nineteen languages and has been broadcast in almost every country in sub-Saharan Africa and others far beyond –in Fiji, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Haiti... A colleague from Senegal<sup>3</sup> overheard a conversation outside a shop in a poor district of the Madagascan capital, Antananarivo. A young man had just bought biscuits and his friend was teasing him, saying that he knew he had really been trying to buy condoms. They were joking about Olga’s film.

Olga’s idea for the “The Shop” was one of 4,000 stories contributed by 13,000 young people from Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso for a 1997 contest. Over a three-month period, scores of local organisations in the three West African countries had mobilised young people up to the age of 24 to come up with an idea for a short fiction film that would educate their communities about HIV/AIDS. The winning ideas were selected by a succession of juries at national and then at international level, before being transformed into short films by leading African directors. These were then dubbed into a range of languages, donated to broadcasters, and distributed at community level on VHS cassette and CD-Rom.

Olga’s film, “The Shop”, was directed by fellow Burkinabè Idrissa Ouédraogo<sup>4</sup>, whose latest feature film had been in contention for the Palme d’Or, the most coveted prize at the Cannes Film Festival, earlier that year. Olga had the pleasure of acting as his on-set adviser for “The Shop”. Having grown up in Ouagadougou, the capital of African cinema and home to FESPACO, the bi-annual Pan-African Film Festival, she had long nurtured the dream of becoming a film director herself. In January 2004, her ambition was fulfilled as she co-directed two *Scenarios* films with young Senegalese director Hamet Fall Diagne.

Since 1997, when Olga thought up the idea for “The Shop”, more than 42,000 young people from 25 African countries have participated in three *Scenarios from Africa* contests, and twenty-eight films have been produced. Available in up to twenty languages, the first 13 films have been broadcast in almost every country in sub-Saharan Africa, often intensively, and are widely used as a discussion tool at community level. In addition to her directorial debut, Olga has attended international film festivals, sat on juries to select winning *Scenarios* scripts, featured in *Scenarios* films, adapted the films for use on radio, and co-ordinated the most successful national *Scenarios* contest in Burkina Faso to date, encouraging a new generation of young Africans to follow her lead.

<sup>3</sup> The late and sadly missed Abasse Kâ.

<sup>4</sup> Olga and Idrissa are not related. Ouédraogo is a very common last name in Burkina Faso.

## Background

*Scenarios from Africa*<sup>5</sup> is a community mobilisation, education, research and media process with the goal of improving the lives of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, reducing the vulnerability of populations at risk of infection, and helping local organisations develop their capacity for effective HIV/AIDS education. It is also a highly diverse collection of individuals and their organisations committed to fighting the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

*Scenarios from Africa* grew out of a 1995-1996 cross-cultural research project exploring innovative methods of HIV communication for young people. In several West African countries visited in the course of the research, the present authors witnessed a disproportionate emphasis being placed in HIV/AIDS education on biomedical aspects of the epidemic, to the neglect of behavioural and contextual factors. This was leaving young people thinking of HIV as a spiky red virus that attacks people's white blood cells, rather than as a social phenomenon of urgent relevance to their day-to-day lives and behaviour. It was also evident that there was a real shortage of audio-visual tools that were adapted to HIV education needs and culturally appropriate and linguistically accessible to local communities. Drawing inspiration from a French model<sup>6</sup>, *Scenarios from Africa* was designed with local partner organisations<sup>7</sup> to address these concerns: to encourage young people to situate the epidemic in potentially real-life narratives, and to produce a collection of short fiction films to generate dialogue and reflection at community level. Over the course of the past eight years the process has evolved significantly and grown in richness.

The bedrock of *Scenarios from Africa* is partnership. The process is founded on the collaboration of literally hundreds of diverse partners, large and small, from a wide range of sectors, civil society, private and governmental. Despite its high media profile, evident in the distribution of Olga's film "The Shop", its centre of gravity is firmly rooted at community level. Many of the members of the *Scenarios from Africa* team are community-based organisations (CBOs) living and working in their own urban, peri-urban or rural milieux in direct contact with local people. They work in a variety of fields of development. Many are dedicated to HIV/AIDS prevention, support, treatment and care, some are run by people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), and some address the needs of specific groups (street kids, women, the disabled...). Add to this foundation leading African film directors, actors and production teams, music celebrities, broadcasters, government ministers, international non-governmental organisations

<sup>5</sup> *Scenarios from Africa* exists thanks to the primary support of Comic Relief (UK), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Pfizer Foundation, the Community Fund, and UNFPA.

<sup>6</sup> "3,000 Scénarios contre un virus", carried out by CRIPS and its partners in France in the early 1990s. We are indebted to CRIPS for their friendship, support and ongoing collaboration.

<sup>7</sup> A key partner in the conceptualisation phase and since, Africa Consultants International (ACI), Dakar, had laid the foundation for *Scenarios from Africa* in Senegal by helping to build a remarkable CBO network through a series of training courses.

406 | (NGOs), schools and tens of thousands of young people, and you get an idea of the diverse human core of *Scenarios from Africa*.

### Methodology

Although the *Scenarios from Africa* process follows a basic methodology, team members incorporate its activities and resources into their programmes in the manner of their choosing, so as best to complement and enhance their own ongoing work. The Scenarios process involves three basic steps, which can be broken down into additional components as follows:

#### *Contest*

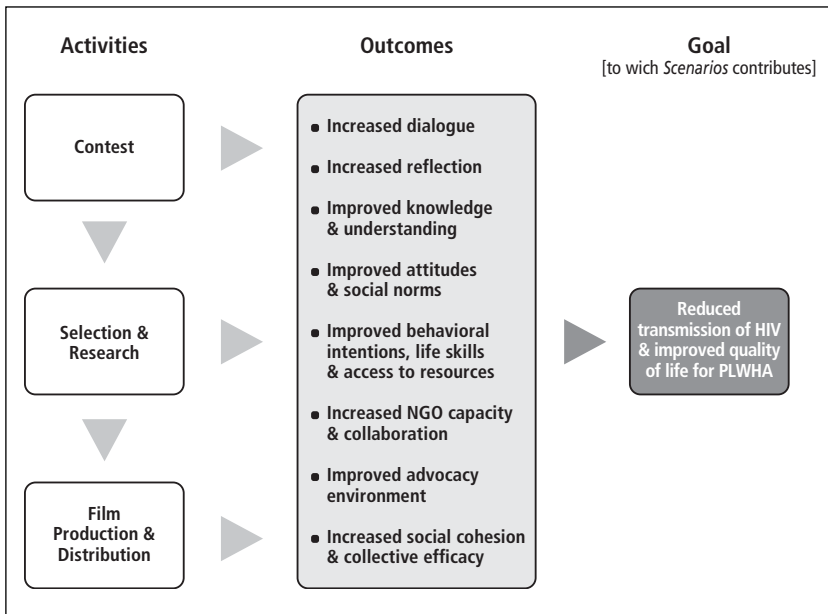
- » An international contest is held in which hundreds of partners work together to mobilise young Africans up to the age of 24 to develop creative ideas for short films on HIV/AIDS.

#### *Selection and Analysis*

- » Selection: in a dialogue-based process, contest winners are selected by juries made up of: PLWHA and other specialists in HIV prevention, treatment and care; former contest winners and other young people; and communication specialists, including the internationally acclaimed filmmakers who go on to transform the winning ideas into short films.
- » Analysis: the creative works submitted in the contest are analysed with a view to gaining a deeper understanding of young Africans' communication needs. Findings are fed into script adaptation and film production and circulated to the wider AIDS community.

#### *Production and Distribution*

- » Adaptation: selected winning scenarios undergo a lengthy and rigorous adaptation and pre-testing process at the hands of local and international specialists, particularly PLWHA, and local communities.
- » Production: leading African directors and their production teams transform the adapted scripts into short fiction films between 2 and 15 minutes long. The films are also adapted for use on radio.
- » Users' guide: drawing on community-level and partner feedback, along with input provided through the selection and adaptation processes, a discussion guide is formulated to facilitate effective use of the films.
- » Dubbing: the films and radio shows are dubbed into a range of African and European (English, French, Portuguese) languages.
- » Distribution: the films and radio shows are donated to broadcasters on a rights-free basis and distributed at no cost to CBOs, NGOs and schools.

Figure 1 summarises the *Scenarios* process and its intended outcomes

## Activities

### Contest

Originally held only in three countries in the Western Sahel, under the name “*Scenarios from the Sahel*”, the contest is progressively scaling up to cover all of sub-Saharan Africa. The vast majority of young participants are mobilised at community level. However, the contest is also publicised on television, radio and in the press on a national and international level, with partners like the French-language satellite television station TV5 and the youth magazine *Planète Jeunes* playing a key role in providing international publicity. Young people can also take part by post or via the Internet.

They are encouraged to work in teams to promote dialogue and information-sharing and to facilitate the participation of those who have not had the advantage of formal schooling. Emphasis is increasingly being placed on providing the participants with access to mentors, especially PLWHA (who are under no pressure to disclose their serological status), who are a source of guidance, advice and help with writing. Priority is also being placed on maximising opportunities for the young participants to develop life skills by encouraging them to develop their stories through role play, improvisation, and other forms of experiential learning.

The contest leaflet provides a list of suggested situations which they can, if they choose, use as a starting point for their stories. This list is developed

408 | through a consensus survey of *Scenarios from Africa* team members. Suggested situations cover a wide gamut of themes, for example:

*The boss is worried about AIDS, but he's also very creative. He comes up with lots of ideas, some of them very amusing, to inform his staff about HIV/AIDS.*

Or

*Buying condoms isn't always easy* (the theme which Olga used as inspiration for "The Shop").

Colleagues have created "scenarios" with literacy classes, nomadic populations, theatre troupes, street kids, maids, sex workers, refugees, orphans, taxi drivers, metalworkers, gardeners, entire school classes (with over 100 children) and children as young as five...

### Selection and analysis

The winning ideas are selected by a succession of juries. Each scenario is read by at least two jurors at the national level (and by many more at the international level). Wherever jurors disagree on the merits of an individual scenario, they debate until they reach a consensus.

Members of the first contest juries were quick to recognise that the stories provide unanticipated rich insight into the attitudes, language, and perspectives of the young authors. They came to see the selection of winning ideas as an innovative means of assessing the participants' current communication needs and of identifying some of the strengths and weaknesses of the communication activities around HIV/AIDS conducted in their region to date. Sometimes misunderstandings are manifest in the plot of a story. For example, a character has unprotected sex on a Saturday night (where he is presumed to contract HIV), only to visit the doctor the following Monday morning, where he or she is diagnosed as having AIDS. The considerable number of stories like this indicate that efforts to communicate the speed of progression or the asymptomatic phase of HIV infection to young people have not always met with success.

The stories also tell us about the young participants' attitudes towards PLWHA, and their perceptions of gender norms and HIV/AIDS-related social norms. Jurors are often pleasantly surprised by what they read. On the basis of their reading, they make comments and recommendations for improved practice. These are discussed in plenary and compiled into a report for wider circulation. A research project is planned in collaboration with Emory University in Atlanta and other international partners to conduct an in-depth analysis of the stories, comparing them by geographic region and tracking changes over time, since the first contest in 1997.

## Production

The first step in adapting winning scripts is incorporating the comments and recommendations of jurors. These first drafts are then revised in line with feedback from local specialists, and the young author and the director, where possible, and tested at community level. Feedback leads to further adaptations, further consultations with key stakeholders, and further pre-testing in a rigorous process that can take many months.

The films cover a wide range of themes, for example: the basic facts of transmission; the pain of stigmatisation; non-medicinal ways of helping those living with HIV; disclosure within a serodiscordant couple; wife inheritance; a child's experience of losing his parents to AIDS; the advantages of getting tested; seduction and intergenerational sex in the school context; parent-child dialogue... As the subjects addressed are based on current local needs, the themes treated evolve with the epidemic. The first collection (thirteen films made between 1997 and 2001) tended to focus on prevention issues, whereas the latest collection (produced in 2003-2004) places increasing emphasis on the perspectives and needs of PLWHA. The compilation cassette is designed to be a flexible educational resource, allowing facilitators to select the films that best meet the needs of a specific audience.

Varying in tone from very funny to profoundly touching, the films aim to be optimistic and hopeful, to approach their subject matter in a fresh and novel way, and to generate a powerful emotional response. One of the most popular –and funniest– films from the first collection, “Iron Will”, directed by Fanta Régina Nacro and based on an original idea by Malick Diop Yade, aged 18, and his team from Senegal, tells the story of Moussah, a young man who has a hard time keeping his interest in women in check. With a friend already ill with HIV/AIDS, he is well aware of the dangers he faces. His male friends tell him about the prevention strategy they've chosen as an alternative to condoms. They feel it corresponds well to where they are in their lives right now. But poor Moussah doesn't realise that the expression they are using –“iron underpants”– is their way of talking about “mind over matter” in the face of sexual temptations... and he takes their advice literally, with hilarious results!

In addition to tremendous amusement (one colleague reported witnessing a group of nuns howling with laughter!), the film also sparks dialogue about male abstinence, a behavioural option with a significant image problem, and other prevention strategies. Like Olga's film, “Iron Will” certainly captures people's imagination. It has, for example, led to the expression “iron underpants” entering Malian youth culture, in the local Bambara language, as a code for talking about abstinence and prevention more generally. The influence of “Iron Will” is also evident in a number of scenarios written for the 2002 *Scenarios* contest, following distribution of the film, and it even spawned an “Iron Underpants” film festival in Jamaica the same year.

Although often used with groups, the films can also be used very effectively in individual counselling sessions. A colleague in Burkina Faso

410 | recounts one instance where he did everything he could to calm down a man who had just received a positive test result, but without success. It was not until he showed the man the *Scenarios* film “Shared Hope”, in which a young woman confides her positive test result to a friend, that he calmed down and became receptive to counselling.

### Distribution

Broadcasters appreciate receiving the high quality programming for free and value the films’ short format, which allows them to use them as fillers between programmes. In several countries, including Benin, Mali, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Haiti and the Democratic Republic of Congo, national television stations have taken the initiative to produce special programmes on HIV/AIDS in which the *Scenarios* films are broadcast and then discussed by local specialists. In Nigeria, individual films have been broadcast during the prime-time news, and in several countries they have been broadcast immediately before, during or after Cup of African Nations and World Cup football matches.

A compilation VHS cassette of the films is distributed on a non-profit basis to NGOs, schools and other community organisations. The films have been used in training courses and local prevention activities; as the foundation for counselling and for lifeskills training modules; by mobile cinema units (often on white walls or on a sheet strung between two trees in rural areas); on long-distance bus services and in neighbourhood video clubs; on closed-circuit television in hotels; and in waiting rooms of clinics and counselling and testing centres. They are also used by and for migrant Africans within Africa and on other continents, and in foreign language teaching.

In addition to VHS cassettes, the films are also distributed on CD-Rom. This format is proving to be a surprisingly valuable way to reach small groups in rural communities, allowing a handful of people to watch the films on a laptop computer under a tree in a village, with no need for an external power source or cumbersome equipment<sup>8</sup>.

### Philosophy

*Scenarios from Africa* is coordinated by the British NGO Global Dialogues, of which the present authors are founding members. As our name suggests, we are committed to dialogue as a guiding philosophical principle, a *modus operandi*, and a primary outcome of our activities.

For us, the term *dialogue* encapsulates principles of partnership, empowerment, and efficacy. It echoes Paulo Freire’s principle of dialogical educa-

8 In an innovative application of modern information technologies for development purposes, DynaEnterprises/Senegal, which produced the CD-Rom, has also set up interactive, touch-sensitive kiosks in the waiting area of a popular credit union in Senegal allowing people to select and watch a film in French or three local languages while they are waiting to be served.



tion, in which existing power relations are undermined, and the teacher is simultaneously learner and the learner is simultaneously teacher. We also believe that dialogue should be one of the primary goals of HIV communication in line with the conclusions of a recent report assessing twenty years of HIV communication:

Communication strategies need to be redirected so that they give prominence to the creation of communication environments which encourage interpersonal communication, dialogue and debate, and which focus as much on providing a voice to those most affected by HIV as they do on educating them through messages. The evidence increasingly suggests that only when people become truly engaged in discussions and talking about HIV, does real individual and social change come about (Scalway, 2003).

Through its various component activities, the *Scenarios* process is designed to operate at multiple, mutually reinforcing levels –at the level of the individual, community, society and civil society– in pursuit of long-term social change objectives.

## Empowerment and capacity development

In the *Scenarios* process, community mobilisation is the foundation for a high profile media campaign. This is empowering and motivating for the young participants, the teams of local organisations who implement the contest process, and the creative teams that transform the winning ideas into short films. This empowerment is a crucial way of building social cohesion and individual and collective efficacy, preserving one of the most precious weapons in the fight against AIDS: the belief that we, as individuals and as communities, can make a difference. As PLWHA partners in Burkina Faso have commented: “*Scenarios from Africa* is reaching every corner of the continent, changing attitudes towards those of us who live with the virus –and WE are at the heart of it all! You can’t imagine what that means to us. It makes us feel so useful, so strong”<sup>9</sup>.

*Scenarios from Africa* is an ongoing cyclical process, with a long term perspective. One of its primary aims is to increase the effectiveness of HIV communication in a sustainable way. To this end, the process seeks to operate in a culture of learning. This is especially fostered by the selection sessions, at which communication, HIV and youth specialists learn from one another and from the young authors of the scenarios. As one juror at the 2003 selection session commented: “Taking part in this jury has allowed us to gauge the impact of messages that have been directed at young people and to evaluate the possible interpretations of the messages and images. It’s very useful feedback that will help shape future trends” (Global Dialogues, 2003c). The culture of learning also extends to the film set. Senegalese director Hamet Fall Diagne remembers how the entire crew became involved in the topic when they were making a film. “The sound

9 Personal conversation, March 2004.

412 | man would stop working and correct someone who said something wrong [about HIV]. It was like a training session"<sup>10</sup>.

The process is designed to increase exchange, collaboration and synergies. One of the ways it seeks to reinforce partner structures is by heightening their visibility and helping local communities and other organisations become aware of the resources and services they offer. This is often particularly valuable to recently established organisations or projects. Before the 2002 contest, the *Scenarios* coordinator in northern Togo noted that the HIV community in that neglected part of the country had not established any collaborative fabric to speak of. Today, she reports, collaboration revolves around the "*Scenarios* network"<sup>11</sup>. Association with the *Scenarios* process also often serves to accentuate the credibility of local organisations at community level. One CBO representative in Senegal has commented that "the contest gives our organisation a kind of aura" (Global Dialogues, 2003c).

### Mass media and community reinforcement

It is generally agreed that health communication through the mass media has greatest impact when it is reinforced through interpersonal channels. The *Scenarios* films are extremely effective at generating dialogue. In addition, they have the advantage of multiple distribution platforms –via broadcasts on television and radio and through diverse kinds of screenings by NGOs and CBOs, followed by discussion, at community level. Given the involvement of CBOs in the entire *Scenarios* process, their level of ownership of the final products is correspondingly high. They are therefore in a particularly strong position to advocate for and reinforce the message of the films.

The criteria for selecting the winning scenarios that will be turned into films and radio shows are debated at the start of each selection session. The films are intended to be short enough for effective and efficient use as dialogue triggers in time-limited educational sessions, but long enough to contextualise behaviour, generate real emotional engagement, and thereby increase identification and risk perception. A script does not need to be polished or factually accurate at this stage, but it does need to display the creativity and originality that will allow it –through the skills of top directors, actors and production teams– to attract and retain attention and give rise to constructive debate.

### Thought-provoking narratives, behavioural models

The limitations of didactical and "top-down" approaches when addressing complex behaviours related to sexuality, particularly in resource-poor environments, are evident. If long term social change is to occur, it is crucial to promote critical

10 Personal conversation, August 2001.

11 Personal conversation, March 2003.

thinking throughout society about existing social and gender inequities, which often stymie efforts at individual behaviour change. Both the contest and the films seek to provoke reflection on the root causes of HIV, not least the vulnerability of women, while at the same time promoting strong female role models. The contest provides a particularly powerful forum for discussion as more than half of all participants work in mixed-gender teams.

Male and female members of audiences respond very positively to the strong female characters in the films. In pre-testing of some of the first films in Mali, young men and women in urban and rural contexts said this was one of the things they liked best. "A Ring on her Finger", in which Nancy resists the stratagems her boyfriend uses to try and get her into bed, often provokes applause from the audience. According to a partner in northern Mozambique, "Nancy and Kady [the girlfriend in "The Shop"] inspire our women to contemplate what they want out of relationships. The men in our groups also appreciate these strong women: as one male seminar participant recently noted, 'I want a woman like that, because then I'll know that when she says yes, she really *wants* to be with me'"<sup>12</sup>.

Other films model family support for a person with AIDS ("Uncle Ali", 2000; "African Solidarity", 2004); marital fidelity –in the person of a newly-elected African president! ("Safe Journey", 2004); a couple getting tested for HIV ("Good Reasons", 2004); business-owners helping to protect their workforce from HIV ("The Champions", 2004); or a schoolgirl calling for increased access to antiretrovirals ("A Call to Action", 2004).

## Outcomes

Over 42,000 young people from 25 African countries have taken part in the three *Scenarios from Africa* contests held to date. Evaluations, both external and internal, indicate that the number of people influenced by the contest and associated debate is likely to be considerably higher than the actual number of participants. As one contest participant told an external evaluator, "AIDS is replacing football as the most talked about subject. Before we were not interested, but now we are" (Global Dialogues, 2001).

The contests have proved extremely effective at encouraging young people to seek out information, at generating dialogue with a wide range of people, and at encouraging reflection about HIV/AIDS. As one teacher in Senegal commented: "The marked improvement in knowledge levels became evident when we [teachers] asked specific questions at the end of the contest about topics that had been the source of confusion among students when the contest began". Another teacher in Togo explained that "Before the contest it was shocking, embarrassing to talk about AIDS. Now *Scenarios from the Sahel* has become the way in to talking about AIDS in the school" (Global Dialogues, 2003a).

<sup>12</sup> Personal correspondence, September 2004.

Over half of all participants to date were members of a mixed-gender team, and over 40% were female. In addition to increasingly reaching young people across the continent, the contests have been very successful at reaching young people throughout individual countries. More than a quarter of all participants in the 2002 contest came from a small or medium-sized town, and 13% came from a village. When asked why they decided to take part in the contest, young people state that their main reason was a desire to raise awareness and to speak out. As one contest participant told an external evaluator: "Nobody ever listens to us. We participated in the contest because it finally gave us a chance to say what we think and what we feel" (Global Dialogues, 2001).

The 2002 *Scenarios from Africa* contest team was composed of hundreds (at least 400) of partner organisations or individual outreach workers. In several project countries in 2002, people living with HIV/AIDS served as contest outreach workers and actively engaged participants in dialogue as they went about creating their scenarios. Contest team members made themselves available to respond to questions on the contest and on HIV/AIDS in general – questions asked not only by potential participants, but also by parents, teachers, and traditional and religious leaders. This approach dramatically enhanced community participation in the implementation of the project.

An external evaluation assessing the 2002 contest in Burkina Faso and Togo concluded:

The contest was a wonderful opportunity for synergies and for the mobilisation around the fight against HIV/AIDS of hundreds of associations.... The diversity of the organisations involved was also a source of richness and a factor in its success: neighbourhood youth associations, school youth groups, information centres, support centres of people living with HIV/AIDS, representatives of educational establishments, the communal authorities... (Global Dialogues, 2003a).

The contest reinforces the existing work of partners "by providing a concrete activity to implement, and complementing their on-going activities" (Global Dialogues, 2001). The *Scenarios* process increases links between participants and partners and facilitates contacts between partner organisations, "which is leading to better collaboration now and most likely in the future" (ibid.).

In the 2002/2003 selection process, a total of 113 people from 95 organisations served as jurors at the national or international level. Jury members say that the selection process is "instructive and stimulating, aiding them to rethink current strategies and activities in order to achieve greater impact" (ibid.).

Between 1997 and 2001, thirteen films were produced based on ideas thought up by young people in the original three *Scenarios* countries. All thirteen films are available in at least 12 languages. By September 2004, almost 17,000 video cassettes or CD-Roms of the films had been distributed at community level in Africa in a range of languages. In addition, over 600 audio cas-

settes or CDs of the audio versions of the films (for use on radio) had been distributed. By March 2004, broadcast of the films had been confirmed on over 75 television stations in or serving Africa. The films have been broadcast on locally-based stations in at least 35 countries of continental Africa. Distribution of the 2004 *Scenarios from Africa* films in a range of languages will commence in January 2005.

It is impossible to estimate how many people have been reached by the compilation video, but it is likely that it runs into at least hundreds of thousands. Television broadcasts of the films are likely to have reached tens of millions of Africans. As the representative of one Senegalese NGO told an external evaluator, "We personally have touched hundreds, no thousands of people with these tapes directly, without even attempting to calculate how many millions have been touched through the mass media" (Global Dialogues, 2003b).

External evaluators assessed the reception of the films in Senegal and in Burkina Faso and Togo respectively in spring 2003, and concluded:

The films are widely distributed and their success is real, as they have become the primary awareness-raising resource used by the actors in the field of prevention and care whom I met. Young people say they are moved by the stories recounted in the films and many of them say that their behaviour has changed or is going to change after seeing *Scenarios from the Sahel*. They have contributed to raising the awareness of the general public and particularly young people –while entertaining them– about the modes of prevention linked to realistic and feasible behaviour change. (Global Dialogues, 2003a)

External evaluators are understandably cautious about attributing changes in behaviour to the *Scenarios* process. However, they record repeated instances of young people and NGO representatives doing exactly this, such as girls saying they will abstain from pre-marital sex, facilitators being approached by women for male and female condoms, or the number of young people coming for HIV testing increasing following awareness-raising with the films. In quantitative surveys respondents report that the films make them more inclined to practice a range of risk reduction strategies.

Local partners attribute the appeal of the films to a range of factors, but the consensus is clearly that the process is key to the success of the product:

...the *Scenarios from the Sahel* films are a vision of young people, they present things as young people recount them... In other IEC films, the audience is told this is what you have to do. Here, the *Scenarios from the Sahel* films show the reality. This is the behavior that has the most favourable consequences. This is behaviour at its worst. For example, in "The Shop", they are shown a model. There is no judgement, no condemnation of the action. Behaviours are simply presented with their advantages and disadvantages, without judgement, leaving the viewer to decide

what's best for him (representative of national youth organisation in Burkina Faso, cited in Global Dialogues, 2003b).

A colleague working for a community-based organisation in northern Mozambique writes that participants in their HIV training seminars often ask to watch the *Scenarios* films a second, third or fourth time: "The characters embody our own –often hidden– struggles and emotions, and give an example of how we too may respond. They portray a very real world –an African world, where HIV is raging and heroes are learning to fight back"<sup>13</sup>.

### Conclusions

The *Scenarios* process works in an integrated way, drawing on existing local infrastructure and resources. It operates at multiple mutually-reinforcing levels, with a view to challenging stigma and the root causes of HIV infection and fostering the kind of social cohesiveness that can lead to long-term change. We believe that this is only possible through concerted, coordinated, multi-sectoral efforts that build the capacity of local organisations and help local people to talk about, identify and address their needs and priorities. This action is facilitated and reinforced through the mass dissemination of communication resources that are scripted and produced locally and that model behaviour and advocate for change.

The active community involvement in the production of the *Scenarios* media products ensures their relevance and appeal. In turn, the mass distribution of these products is a powerful motivator for community mobilisation. This methodology is empowering for the young participants, the organisations involved and the creative teams that transform the winning ideas into short films.

The films themselves are high quality, fictional, non-didactic, emotionally powerful, and long enough to contextualise behaviour and promote emotional engagement. Their availability in African languages makes them accessible to the communities that need them most. Their objective is to promote dialogue, reflection, and hope, helping to generate collective efficacy.

Without doubt, young people are key beneficiaries of the *Scenarios* process. However, that process also serves to put young people in a position such that society in general becomes the beneficiary of their knowledge, creativity, and energy.

13 Ibid.