Coaching for Hope Programme for Youths Affected by the Floods in Ouagadougou

On September 1st flash floods claimed 187 lives and affected 635,273 people in west Africa¹. On that day in Burkina Faso, one of the most impoverished nations on earth, an estimated 100,000 people, including two employees of Coaching for Hope, had their homes and possessions literally washed away after 264 millimetres of rain fell in 12 hours - the biggest deluge since records began 90 years ago. Homes fell down, trucks were swept into canals, entire city blocks were washed away and, as often is the case, it was the poorest who suffered the brunt of the floods.

An example of typical flood damage in Ouaga

The largest camp, The Hippodrome, houses over 5000 people

More photos of the flood damage and the camps can be viewed at http://www.flickr.com/photos/42806632@N02/sets/72157622321315573

There are now approximately 63,000 people in Ouagadougou living in camps around the capital, with the rest staying with family and friends. Those in the camps are being cared for by a coalition of national government, International NGOs, and UN departments, who have mounted a superb effort in the face of limited resources to supply the essentials such as tents, food, medicines, temporary hospitals and schools, toilets and such forth. Despite this, the people housed in the camps face six months or more of very difficult conditions. Youths on the camps have nothing much to do and many of them cannot afford the cost of going to school. HIV awareness campaigns are often run through schools, leaving children who are not lucky enough to go to school in a very vulnerable and disempowered position with respect to their ability to make positive informed choices about their sexual health and behaviour. With so many bored youths gathered in one place, Coaching For Hope (CFH) spotted an opportunity to engage with the young flood victims who are outside the school system to talk about sexual health and to provide a day of games and sports.

¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Yesterday CFH launched a programme of fun and educational activities for 50 youths housed in the INJ EPS camp which will run one day per week for the foreseeable future. The intention is for CFH’s experienced educators to spend a day facilitating discussions and giving information about HIV/AIDS and using the medium of sport and play to empower the participants to make positive decisions about their sexual health.

As a programme of Skillshare International, Coaching for Hopes mission is to use football to empower vulnerable young people in developing countries. Coaching for Hope’s strategic goals include increasing access to football and life skills education for vulnerable young people and marginalised groups in Africa; involving children and coaches in relevant educational activities promoting the principles enshrined in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child; increasing awareness of sexual health issues and HIV/AIDS prevention through a football related programme; and increasing awareness of development issues in the UK.

In the shadow of the National Stadium, the Stade 4 Aout, CFH coaches delivered a full day of workshops to 50 participants of both sexes about HIV, which included games, role-plays, condom demonstrations, and discussions about subjects such as HIV transmission / prevention and getting an HIV test.

Interwoven with this were some of CFHs integrated football+HIV training sessions specially designed to reinforce the previous discussions about HIV. It is incredibly difficult for anyone, especially a teenager, to sit and listen for 4 hours (the length of these workshops on sexual health) and pay attention for the whole time. But if that workshop involves a lot of movement, games and activities which require the participants to be fully engaged, such as role plays, and football training sessions involving messages/information about HIV/AIDS then staying focussed becomes much easier. Furthermore, experience has shown us when a football coach talks about sexual health, kids listen. But when you put those same youths on a football field and make a competitive game out the learning they really listen. Why? Because to win the game you have to pay attention. CFH therefore advocates an
approach to learning that is fun and participatory and requires youths to actively engage with the potentially life saving information we are promoting, rather than being passive recipients.

After lunch the 50 participants played in a small 5-a-side football tournament during which CFH coaches talked to small groups of spectators about HIV at the side of the pitch. It was clear from the smiles that everybody had a great time and most importantly learned a lot of valuable information about HIV. The one sad thing about the day was that we were only able to work with a small proportion of the thousands of youths on-site and had to turn many people away due to lack of space.

Whilst we packed up the equipment and prepared to head home the coaches discussed how some girls in the group had spent part of their lunch break visiting a local HIV voluntary testing centre to get tested – direct evidence of the success of the days activities as young people are empowered to take charge of important decisions in their lives.

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