WHAT AFRICA MUST DO TO OVERCOME HIV BY 2030

This World AIDS Day, the international community is focusing on how to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030. Experts believe it can be done; but barriers to HIV care and treatment must be overcome through focusing on priority populations and supporting them through lifelong treatment.

According to experts, the focus must be on identifying the remaining “last mile” barriers and focusing on the unique needs of the vulnerable populations, including the most affected population of all, teenage girls.

“One of the first things we can do to overcome barriers to HIV care is to move away from the ‘tyranny of the aggregate’,” said Nkosi Tshabalala, co-host of a webinar with top African HIV experts and BroadReach Health Development’s Acting District Director of Gert Sibande in Mpumalanga, South Africa – one of the health districts where BroadReach delivers public healthcare in partnership with USAID and the Department of Health.

“That means instead of just looking at general HIV numbers and adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to prevention and care, we must focus on the specific communities that have the highest HIV prevalence. We must determine what we can do for them in a human-centric, caring way to address their specific health needs so that they can reach viral suppression. This is the key to stopping further transmission of HIV in society by 2030.”

“Today, the face of HIV in Africa is a young girl with a baby on her back, who, when faced with the difficult choice of self-care versus child-care, will always sacrifice her own health for her child,” said panelist Thanduxolo Doro, People Living with HIV (PLHIV) Civil Society Leader and Project Management Specialist for USAID South Africa.

According to the recent UNAIDS “In Danger” report, women and girls accounted for 63% of all new HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa. Six out of seven new infections among 15-19-year-olds in the region were among girls. Girls are at greater HIV risk if they engage in sex at a very young age; when they don’t have the power to negotiate condom use; when they have multiple sexual partners; if they are repressed by patriarchal culture and gender-based violence (GBV); and if they have transactional relationships with sexual partners. All symptoms of the current economic environment.
Food in Posters

In Sharm, food was exceptionally expensive. The average price of a decent meal in the main centre was a whopping USD 20 and regrettably, not everyone could afford this hefty price. This meant that if you did not have the dollar then you would have to endure hunger, literally. Unless you made your way to the restaurants near Naama Bay and then back to the conference. Considering that many Africans do not earn in dollars, it was obvious that they were meant to relieve their hunger again in an international space.

“If the Children and Youth booth were not offering free coffee, I wonder if I would have made it,” lamented Hassan from Somalia, “We literally depended on the morning breakfast in our hotel, and had to carry some food to the conference because what was available on the COP ground was pricy,” he said. “The affordable restaurants were not easily accessible,” agreed Collins from Zimbabwe. In the previous COP26, the delegates were served food and it was free or cheap, but never pricy. COP26 organizers sourced 80% of food from Scotland to cater to international needs and live up to the expectation of an international event. The food was free not because the U.K government was naturally generous but because the organizers wanted it to be affordable, especially by persons coming from communities that were hardest hit by the climate and food crisis,” he added.

Lamentably COP27 eateries did the exact opposite. They made the food expensive, the “grab and go” areas were crowded with long lines and the variety of meals was abysmal i.e., vegetarians did not have enough greens to eat. Their main threats were pictures of large fruits drawn in pavilions and in some posters.

He who had the dollar had it all

The main relationship between the COP delegates and the Egyptian nationals was the dollar. Many delegates were literally ripped off. The cab drivers over-exaggerated the costs i.e., a trip that would cost Egyptian dollars 200 was tripled to 800 and sometimes even 1,000 for the same distance.

“The Egyptian taxis were quite the scam. I feel like they should have been cheaper but the drivers took advantage of COP27 and inflated the price, this really ruined my experience,” confesses Mr. Nyamwange, a youth delegate from Kenya. “I was disappointed by the cab driver, the taxis didn’t have receipts and were taking advantage of people by charging more than the norm,” said Kudakwashe from Zimbabwe.

“I paid almost Around USD 15 dollars from Naama Bay to Ol Montazah, “said Mr. Aston from Kenya. “From Park Regency to Naama Bay, we parted with USD 10 dollars and the taxi man refused to give us a receipt. The same trip is only USD 2 dollars in Cairo,” said Rania from Egypt.
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COP27 and the shame of the Africannness

Most cab drivers used every opportunity to siphon every dollar from the delegate's pockets. Bargaining and negotiation depicted the relationship the global south States have with the affluent global north. In other words, (s)he who had the dollar had it all. Unfortunately, the cab drivers did not provide receipts. Most of the prices were determined by the driver. In some cases, the drivers smoked while ferrying passengers. The smoking was also extended by some of the bus drivers who did this as they ferried passengers from the main conference center. Some attempted to clean up to attempt to smoke out the evidence, through the air conditioner, but it didn’t work. The journey was smoked out!

No Sleep, Swindled Accommodation
When it came to accommodation, the dollar was not spared. “We had cancellations on arrival and price gauging,” said one of the delegates from Australia. The rates went overboard, overnight. “The host didn’t care whether you slept in the streets after giving you a last-minute disappointment, they simply didn’t care,” said Queen from Nigeria. “Several hotels that had initially charged USD 35 dollars per night changed the price to USD 100 per night some to USD 250, and others exceeded USD 400 per night “lamented a participant from South Africa. “The revised costs did not cover any meals, and so the delegates had to pay extra for meals and water”.

Those delegates who opted to stay in Airbnb were treated to dirt, broken appliances, and irresponsible staff who refused to attend to their pleas and grievances. Many COP 27 delegates endured the gross misconduct of caretakers and the discomfort of dollar-centered hosts.

The Bus Is Full
While it is praiseworthy that the Egyptian government invested in non-polluting bus services, it was quite challenging for the COP 27 delegates to get them on time. The buses were in plenty but surprisingly they were always full. The initial communication was that the COP 27 delegates would have free bus rides to and from the main venue including the Green Zone. However, this reality was not so particularly because the buses were always ferrying carrefour workers, children, and other sought of persons to the destinations within the COP 27 route. The buses designated to the Green Zone were provided in the second week of the conference after much pleading. Most delegates had to stand in the bus rides because they were always full, especially in the evenings. In the unlikely event that the delegates were in rush, then, they would have to dollar their way through the taxis. The question that remains answered is whether the buses were really full or were the delegates really fooled.

Lost and damaged
If Egypt was a global south state such a scam would have been printed and noised in the public for all to see that Africans are still backward, black, and bad. But it was not. This COP did not happen in Africa. It happened in Egypt, which unfortunately tends to be African when it is convenient but Arabic when it is important.
The last African COP happened in 2006 in Nairobi Kenya. It was dabbed COP 12 and took place from 6th to 14th November 2006. Since then, Africans in all their diversities have been lost and damaged. Lost because they have to lose their dignity in seeking visas, and travel prerequisites that favor the West and the rest. Damaged because their own natural resources have been plundered, their dignity shuttered and their right to speak out in international spaces shunned, just like in Sharm. Oh Sharm, what a scam!