

UNAIDS encourages journalists to champion HIV prevention



Dr. Tharcisse Barihuta encouraging student journalists to use their platforms to share HIV prevention messages. *UNAIDS*

As part of the 5th Africa Digitalisation Conference and the 26th Annual General Conference, which took place from 25-29 September 2017, UNAIDS raised awareness among student journalists of the media's role in ending HIV/AIDS transmission by 2030, in line with national development agendas and the global Fast Track targets.

Specifically, the media is crucial in sharing health and HIV/AIDS prevention messages to a large audience through mass communication channels, including broadcast, print and social media.

Dr. Tharcisse Barihuta, the UNAIDS Country Director in Namibia, explained that journalists can use media to mobilise people to go for HIV testing and assist in creating behaviour change to prevent HIV transmission.

Journalists can also raise awareness about child marriage and the cycle of HIV transmission. Dr. Barihuta emphasized the importance of not only focusing on young girls, who are statistically at higher risk of child marriage and gender-based violence (GBV), but also to focus on men in order to break the cycle of HIV transmission. When tackling HIV/AIDS and formulating messages, three components must be considered – culture, religion and scientific knowledge.

Dr. Barihuta encouraged the student journalists to champion HIV prevention and to be agents of change. Journalists played a large role in the Protect the Goal Campaign, a programme that started in Namibia in October 2013 and ended in 2014.

Under the theme, “Just like the teams need to protect their goals, we need to protect ourselves and our bodies from HIV”, the campaign spread messages on prevention, offered testing and counselling, and distributed condoms during the football matches.