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“MTV SHUGA” launches three new campaigns in South Africa and Côte d'Ivoire, focusing on HIV prevention and self-testing

Amsterdam, 25 July 2018: Unitaid, the MTV Staying Alive Foundation (MTV SAF) and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine today announced a three-year partnership to introduce storylines on HIV innovation, including HIV self-testing and preventive drugs (PrEP) into the award-winning drama series *MTV Shuga*. The programme is designed to help millions of young viewers in French- and English-speaking Africa protect themselves from HIV.

The effort, unveiled during the 22nd International AIDS Conference, will span Southern Africa and Western francophone Africa and deliver three new TV series of *MTV Shuga*, together with a multi-media campaign that promotes sexual health. The enhanced programme will target hard-to-reach populations, particularly people 15 to 24 years old.

The new *MTV Shuga* campaigns will be deployed in South Africa and Côte d'Ivoire between 2018 and 2020. Preliminary work for both countries begins this year, with the first television series due to broadcast in the first half of 2019 in South Africa, followed by two seasons in Côte d'Ivoire.

MTV Shuga fuses hard-hitting storylines with sexual health messages to influence viewers' attitudes and behaviour. The “edutainment” campaign also features: a radio drama that expands on *MTV Shuga* storylines; print, digital and social media activity; and peer education programmes that challenge stigma and obstacles to young people's sexual health.

The campaign—centered on HIV prevention and testing, preventive drugs known as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), HIV self-testing, and HIV treatment—aims to show young people how to protect themselves from the virus, and to seek out treatment.

AIDS remains the leading cause of death among 10- to 24-year-olds in Africa, bolstering the case for innovations and investments that place a high priority on this age group. Through the *MTV Shuga* campaign, Unitaid and MTV SAF will shine a spotlight on young people's real-life concerns.

The campaign in francophone Côte d'Ivoire represents a commitment to the region, following years of focus on English-speaking countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

MTV Shuga is produced by MTV SAF and supported by Unitaid, a Geneva-based organization that funds promising innovations, such as HIV self-testing, that have the potential to make fast, sweeping improvements in global health. The success of *MTV Shuga* in influencing the attitudes and behaviour of viewers will be evaluated by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

Lelio Marmora, executive director of Unitaid, commented: “Millions of people in Africa watch *MTV Shuga*. Our partnership with MTV Staying Alive gives us a terrific opportunity to reach young people who don't have reliable health information and empower them to take charge of their health — including testing themselves for HIV.”

Georgia Arnold, executive director of the MTV Staying Alive Foundation and executive producer of *MTV Shuga* stated: “The need to focus on the sexual health of young people is more important today than ever before. With the advent of developments like HIVST and PrEP, we have a unique opportunity to effect real change in young people’s lives. Continuing a multi-platform approach for *MTV Shuga* helps us keep reaching youth in every aspect of their lives and encourage an ongoing dialogue in the global fight against HIV.”

Professor Peter Piot, Director of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine added: “We are delighted to be working with the MTV Staying Alive Foundation by leading studies in South Africa and Cote d’Ivoire to evaluate MTV Shuga’s impact on increasing the demand and uptake of HIV self-testing and PrEP. With its broad reach and popular appeal across Africa, MTV Shuga has the potential to stimulate awareness of and demand for prevention and treatment services, particularly for young women and men, among whom HIV risk remains persistently high.”

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About MTV Shuga

MTV Shuga is an award-winning drama series that aims to harness the power of entertainment to change the attitudes and behaviour of young people around the world. The campaign includes a radio drama, print, digital and social media, and peer education programmes. It has been broadcast on over 180 channels in 70 countries, and has reached 720 million households.

MTV Shuga began in Kenya in 2009, and expanded to Nigeria and South Africa, becoming the media industry’s gold-standard in behaviour-change campaigns. The ‘edutainment’ model will return to South Africa for another season, and venture into French-speaking Africa for the first time. A recent study carried out by the World Bank showed that viewers of the series were twice as likely to get tested for HIV six months after watching the show, and there was a 58% reduction of chlamydia among female viewers¹. The impact of the new seasons of programmes will be evaluated by LSHTM, working closely with research partners in South Africa and Cote d’Ivoire

Editor’s Notes

Although young people are significantly affected by the HIV epidemic, they are rarely considered important stakeholders in shaping strategies against the disease. Such neglect translates into devastating statistics. In sub-Saharan Africa, survey data from 35 countries showed that only 36% of young men and 30% of young women can identify ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV, and can recognize major misconceptions about HIV transmission².

In Southern Africa, structural, social and educational factors have contributed to consistently high levels of HIV/AIDS among certain groups. In South Africa, which has the biggest HIV epidemic in the world, testing falls substantially short of the need³. One million people living with HIV in South Africa are unaware that they are infected. Lack of testing is partly to blame: only 52% of young women (15-24 years) and 38% of young men were tested and received results over the course of one-year study in 2016.⁴

While the scope of the HIV epidemic in Côte d’Ivoire is comparatively smaller than in South Africa, young people are still considered a highly vulnerable social group. In a 2016 study, only 22% of young

¹ World Bank <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/438421467236362785/Entertainment-Edu-workshop-Flyer-6-3-16.pdf> accessed June 2018

² UNAIDS ‘Prevention Gap Report’ 2016

³ UNAIDS ‘aidsinfo.unaids.org’ accessed September 2017

⁴ Department of Health (DOH) South Africa ‘Demographic Health Survey (DHS)’ 2016

women (15-24) and 12% of young men were tested for HIV and received results over the course of a year, and strikingly low levels of knowledge about HIV/AIDS⁵ were noted.

Glossary

PrEP: Known as pre-exposure prophylaxis, PrEP is a one-pill-daily antiretroviral treatment that can reduce the risk of HIV infection from sex by more than 90 percent. People who believe they are at high risk of getting HIV take PrEP to avoid infection. The drug is targeted at groups considered vulnerable to HIV infection, such as adolescent girls in certain areas.⁶

HIV self-testing (HIVST): The low levels of HIV testing among men, youth and other at-risk populations in sub-Saharan Africa has created a gap which self-testing kits can help to fill. Self-testing allows people to learn their HIV status in private, and is designed to increase the use of HIV prevention and treatment services⁷.

Hard-to-reach populations: These are groups that public health initiatives struggle to reach. They include young people, men, female sex workers and men who have sex with men.⁸

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⁵ Ministère Du Plan et du Développement 'Les Situation des Femmes et des Enfants en Côte d'Ivoire' Enquête à indicateurs multiples MICS, 2016

⁶ Unitaid unitaid.eu/news-blog/south-africa-launch-hiv-prevention-project/#en accessed June 2018

⁷ Unitaid <https://unitaid.eu/news-blog/worlds-largest-hiv-self-testing-initiative-expands-critical-new-phase/#en> accessed June 2018

⁸ Unitaid <https://unitaid.eu/news-blog/unitaid-and-south-africa-partner-to-accelerate-hiv-and-tb-prevention-and-treatment/#en> accessed June 2018