

KZN health MEC excited about the impact of “she conquers/dreams” campaign at uMgungundlovu as some high schools record zero pregnancies

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The roll-out of the “She Conquers/DREAMS” campaign which is aimed at encouraging adolescent girls and young women to stay safe; determine their future and not rely on “Sugar Daddies” is bearing fruit at Umgungundlovu.

The community of Vulindlela, Taylors Halt, outside of Pietermaritzburg, has historically been hit hard by HIV and AIDS, and many of its young people were previously found to be involved in inter-generational sexual relationships. But the uptake of condoms and contraceptives has grown exponentially among young people, since the introduction of the “She Conquers/DREAMS” campaign after its launch by then Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa in 2016.

Incorporating the DREAMS initiative, which stands for “**D**etermined, **R**esilient, **E**mpowered, **A**IDS-Free, **M**entored and **S**afe” lives for these girls and young women, “She Conquers” seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- Decreasing new HIV infections in girls and young women by at least 30%; from 90 000 per year, to less than 60 000;
- Decrease teenage pregnancies (under 18) from 73 000 to 50 000;
- Increase the number of girls who finish matric by 20%;
- Increase youth employment and economic opportunities by 10%

Yesterday, MEC Dhlomo visited the community of Vulindlela, Taylors Halt, and heard uplifting testimonials from youth of school-going age who have been empowered with information on the importance of abstinence from sex, as well as the benefits of using condoms, undergoing medical male circumcision and the use of female contraceptives.

At Msunduzi, including in the Vulindlela area, condom promotion and distribution efforts have yielded the following results:

- 364 000 male condoms and 9 800 condoms were distributed;
- 1890 young women aged between 20-24 were reached; while 2580 sexually active men aged between 15-49 were reached; and
- 427 adolescent girls (aged 15-19); and 26 others aged 10-14 were also reached.

An upbeat KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo expressed his delight at the positive impact of the “She Conquers/DREAMS” campaign. He also visited Taylor’s Halt Clinic, and commended its management for the effective running of a Youth User-Friendly health service, incorporating the “Happy Hour” initiative at the health facility. Here, young people are afforded access to sexual reproductive health services in a free and welcoming environment.

MEC Dhlomo said: “We were excited to be in this area under Inkosi uZondi at Mpumuza, supported by Taylors Halt Clinic. This area had a high prevalence of HIV, and we therefore intervened, along with many of our partners, including CAPRISA, Health Systems Trust and we are beginning to see an impact, which we want to accelerate. Here, I was meeting children from various primary and high school, to assess the impact of “She Conquers,” which is a national campaign launched by President Cyril Ramaphosa.

“I’m happy to listen to the stories of these young people. There are high schools here that have reported zero teenage pregnancy last year. And that is something to be celebrated. We need to accelerate this, and motivate these youngsters. These youngsters are not HIV positive. They do not have sexually transmitted infections, but they are at a very high risk of acquiring those infections if we don’t accelerate the programmes and preventative plans that we are putting in place.”

Ms Lindiwe Msimang, Dreams District Coordinator at Umgungundlovu said the campaign originated from the office of President Cyril Ramaphosa, through the SA National Aids Council, and led by the Departments of Health, Social Development and Education, as well as the SAPS. This programme is located in the office of the Premier, and has a co-ordinator who is based at district level, and works closely with the district HIV/Aids co-ordinator.

“The way that this programme works is that each and every identified girl has a mentor whom she is able to approach whenever any challenge arises. Even when they want to get involved in romantic relationships and/or indulge in sexual activity, they are able to receive the right kind of advice from their mentors, such as using condoms and avoiding unplanned pregnancy.”

Addressing the children, parents and educators in attendance, Inkosi Nsikayezwe Zondi of the Phumuza area, urged them to delay sexual activity for as long as possible, and report any sexual predators to their mentors and to the authorities. He also called on both men and women to stop preying on young children, expressing as much concern for Sugar Daddies/”Blessers” and the so-called “Ben-10s” – young men who get involved in relationships with older women.

“We are here to say that children are getting raped by fathers, stepfathers, and uncles. Let there be no silence. That child’s future is destroyed when they get raped. Let it not be a family secret. Let us speak out against the rape of children. These are bad habits that were not practiced in the olden days. The rape of children and any person in society, whether it’s a woman or a man, must come to an end. Let us not destroy our children. Let us not destroy the nation. Down with sugar daddies, down with sugar mommas. You, my children, do not allow anyone to touch you. If someone does this to you, report them to the police urgently. You are the flowers of the nation. As parents, we look to you to take care of these children. Do not abuse them.”



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