HIV and AIDS continues to be one of the major Sexual and Reproductive Health issues facing young people in Uganda. The risk of HIV among young people is aggravated by the fact that most young people are having their sexual debut at an early age of 15 years and that teenage pregnancy is still disproportionately high at 25% in the Country (UDHS, 2016).

The young women aged 15 to 24 face higher risk than young men as HIV prevalence is almost four times higher among them than young men of the same age (MoH UPHIA, 2017). The risk of HIV among young people in Uganda is also heightened by Gender-Based Violence (including sexual abuse). Indeed, young Ugandan women who have experienced intimate partner violence are 50% more likely to have acquired HIV than women who had not experienced violence (UAC, 2015).

Yet the level of knowledge on HIV prevention and access to sexual education among young women and men in Uganda is still telling. In 2014, only 38.5% of young women and men aged 15-24 could correctly identify ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV and rejected major misconceptions about HIV transmission (UNAIDS, 2017).

As Uganda joins the rest of the world to commemorate World AIDS Day 2018, we must prioritize approaches that will help to get young people to know their HIV status and those found HIV positive to be initiated on treatment immediately.

It is on this basis that the Sexual Reproductive Health Alliance (SRHR) Uganda through its 8 members including; Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU), Reach A Hand Uganda (RAHU), Straight Talk Foundation (STF), Family Life Education Program (FLEP), Centre for Human Rights & Development (CEHURD), Uganda Network of Young People Living with HIV/AIDS (UNYPA), Restless Development Uganda (RD) and National Forum of People Living with HIV and AIDS Networks in Uganda (NAFOPHANU) have adopted a number of innovative approaches to mobilize, empower and link young people to HIV prevention services.

The alliance programs have been designed in line with the principles of “what young people want and what young people need.” The alliance partners have used targeted campaigns such as #iKnowKat, alliance week, social media campaigns and #spaces4youths to mobilize young people to test and know their HIV status. Creating discussion forums such as twogere tool kit, intergenerational dialogue, peer to peer and table talks have also increased awareness about HIV and AIDS among young people and most of those involved end up taking an HIV test.

To address the bottleneck of “long distance” to services, the alliance partners especially Reproductive Health Uganda and Family Life Education Program have carried targeted outreaches in the hard to reach areas such landing sites and remote sub-counties using combination prevention model. This has led to increased access and utilization of HIV and AIDS services such as HIV testing, condoms, and care and treatment services for those found to be HIV positive.

The young people in schools are equally vulnerable to the risk of HIV. Using the “Whole School Approach,” our partners Straight Talk Foundation, Restless Development and Reach A hand Uganda have undertaken a number of interventions including the formation of clubs, training peer educators, training junior journalists, sexuality education sessions and targeted outreaches in the selected schools.

Through the innovative “+ Beauty Pageant” campaign spearheaded by the UNYPA, many young People have opened up about their HIV status and overcome self and community stigma. This initiative has also created a brand of community, national and international HIV advocates and ambassadors among young people.

As a country, we have to prioritize creating enabling policies and legal environment for young people to access HIV and AIDS and other SRHR services. Our partners CEHURD and NAFOPHANU have been engaging different stakeholders including government agencies, line ministries, and Civil Society Organisations, religious and cultural leaders among others to influence positive policy change in the country.

Prevention of HIV among young people should not only be at the center of HIV response in the country but also all other development agenda. This is because Uganda is one of the countries with the world’s youngest population and to leverage on the demographic dividend from this young population, there is need to ensure that young people are “healthy and productive”