



## Namibia Assistance (Bi-) Weekly Announcement (\*NAWA)

*\*NAWA: Oshiwambo for  
good news*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>“Writing for Kids” program launched</i>	1
<i>Supporting “Community Action” to fight HIV/AIDS</i>	2
<i>First Namibian sign language book published</i>	3

## “WRITING FOR KIDS” PROGRAM LAUNCHED



A new series of children’s books written by Namibians for Namibians will now be available for the reading pleasure of young learners in the North. The first two titles in a series of books were released under the “Writing for Kids” program and have been translated into four local languages.

The books’ authors are all student-teachers at Namibia’s colleges of education, trained by the National Institute of Education Development (NIED) in a writing camp in May, 2004. The stories were edited and translated by NIED education officers and illustrated by students at the John Muafangoyo Art Centre in Windhoek. Pollination Publishers designed and published the books.

The launch took place on January 27 and the first titles in the series were presented to the Minister for Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC), Hon. John Mutorwa, by USAID Director, Gary Newton. The Directors of six education regions and senior officials of MBESC attended the event. Authors and illustrators presented signed copies of their books to guests at the ceremony.

The readers will be distributed to primary schools in the six northern education regions for use in Grades 2 and 3 to promote improved reading and increased awareness of HIV/AIDS and related health issues that can affect young learners and their families.

The “Writing for Kids” program is funded by the U.S. Mission to Namibia through USAID under the Basic Education Support (BES) Project for which the Academy for Educational Development (AED) is the main implementer and source of technical support.

A new phase of U.S. support for basic education was launched in October 2004 under which US\$21.4 million will be provided over the next five years to further strengthen basic education in Namibia. Since 1991, USAID has provided approximately \$40.76 million in support of Namibian efforts to provide quality basic education for all.

## SUPPORTING “COMMUNITY ACTION” TO FIGHT HIV/AIDS

The young people were nervous – they had never talked about HIV/AIDS with their parents, elders, or community leaders before. For the first time, different groups of people in Rehoboth talked frankly about the impact of AIDS in their community as part of a community mobilization intervention, an innovative community-led program funded by the U.S. Government Emergency Plan through USAID and implemented by the Johns Hopkins University Health Communication Partnership (HCP).

*“People never ask us what we feel and what we believe,” said one young woman. An older woman added, “we are usually invisible here... Now our ideas are being heard.”*

The U.S. Government launched its community mobilization program in 2003 with the purpose of effecting social change at the grass roots level in order to halt the rise of HIV infection by addressing the major behavioral and social factors that are driving the epidemic. The program is targeting communities surrounding treatment/prevention of mother to child transmission sites designated by the Ministry of Health and Social Services. This mobilization process is designed to help participants identify the behavioral causes of HIV in their community and then supports them in developing strategies to eliminate the negative social norms that fuel the epidemic.

Part of a long-term process, community mobilization consists of initial meetings with community and opinion leaders, followed by a baseline survey. The survey results feed into community consultative sessions where community members and peer groups share their thoughts, feelings, and solutions. Long-term solutions are undertaken to change the root causes of HIV/AIDS, either through implementation of a “Community Action Forum” or identification of a structure to assume that role, depending on the particular community. While HCP trains and supports the community groups, the process and strategies belong to the individual communities.

Mobilization activities have already yielded results. *“These discussions made me realize that when I drink, I forget to protect myself, so I’ve decided to stop drinking,”* concluded one older man. A nurse who attended a community meeting was shocked to hear how negatively participants viewed the

hospital, and promised to take the feedback to hospital staff.

The ultimate goal of this program is to enable communities to see themselves as having the power and ability to take action and make a difference in the fight against AIDS. Community members enthusiastically agree. *“We want to be involved and never knew how before... I’m going to do whatever I can to help,”* said one participant.



A community member speaks out during a community meeting

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## FIRST NAMIBIAN SIGN LANGUAGE BOOK PUBLISHED

When John Madison, an International Foundation for Education and Self Help (IFESH) volunteer at the Eluwa Special School in Ongwediva, tried to obtain a book of Namibian signs in order to learn Namibian sign language, he was told that there wasn't one. At John's initiative, the school submitted an application to the USAID-funded small grants program for basic education support, and received seed money to develop a Namibian sign language book for beginning signers.

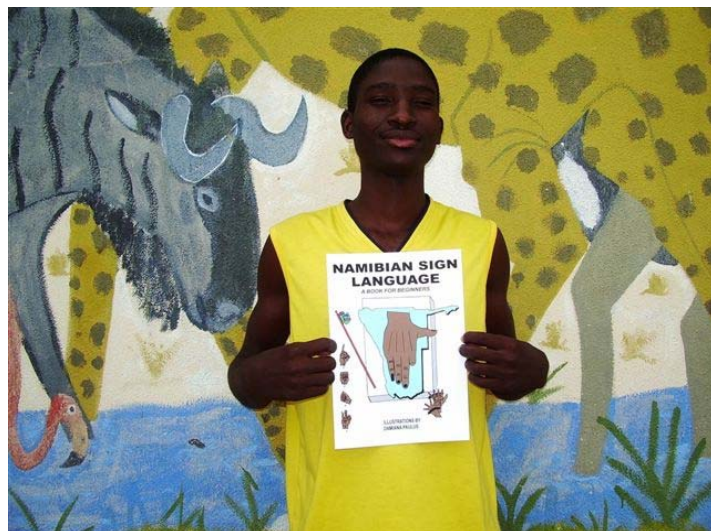
The school hired Damiana Paulus, a 21-year-old deaf man and graduate of Eluwa, to draw the many signs for the book. He is the only deaf person in his family but does communicate in sign language with his 19-year-old sister. He has attended several art classes and expresses a special interest in drawing. The Namibian Sign Language book is Damiana's first major assignment. According to John, Damiana's drawings are exceptionally clear and precise and show maturity and character. *"With his talents and personality, Damiana could easily become a successful 'cultural broker' between the deaf and hearing worlds."*

The exposure and the experience gained through the Sign Language book, as well as the quality of his work, have earned Damiana a job with the National Association for the Deaf. They were impressed with the illustrations in the book and have hired him to be the artist for the Sign Language Dictionary.

The Namibian Sign Language book will be placed on the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) web page to be used by teachers and teacher educators.

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Damiana Paulus holding a copy of the Namibian Sign Language book he illustrated