

# **Words of Hope ministry changes outlook for people with AIDS**

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Words of  
Hope  
counselor  
Enock  
Kategaya  
walks  
from  
Bible  
study.  
Along the  
way, he  
counsels  
a man  
about  
living a  
healthy  
life with  
HIV.  
Around 1  
million  
Ugandans  
live with  
HIV.  
(IMB  
photos by  
Sue  
Sprenkle)

## **Words of Hope ministry changes**

# outlook for people with AIDS

**By Sue Sprenkle**

*International Mission Board*

MAKOPE STATION, Uganda (BP)—Saidat Makop is sick. To look at her, a casual observer would never know. She looks as healthy as the next person. Her cheeks are rosy. She works in the garden for hours. Her eyes might look a little tired at times, but all mothers suffer the same.

The truth is Makop carries HIV in her body.



Squeezed between her mother and another woman, this young Ugandan girl entertains herself during a Bible study at Saidat Makop's home. This girl's mother is HIV-positive. Her father left when the mother revealed her test results, leaving all the children behind and victims of HIV/AIDS.

She is just one of more than 40 million children and adults globally who live with HIV/AIDS. Sub-Saharan Africa, where Makop's country of Uganda lies, bears the heaviest burden of the pandemic. UNAIDS estimate 28.5 million,

or 64 percent, of the people living with HIV/AIDS call Sub-Saharan Africa home. About 97 percent of all AIDS-related deaths in 2005 occurred in this region.

Even though Makop is healthy and takes antiretroviral drugs for the disease, she knows her odds of surviving. She lives in a country where AIDS education is a top priority, but it's not the numerous government sponsored billboards or radio programs that tell Makop she's been given a death sentence. It's personal experience. After all, she's watched family and friends die from AIDS-related illnesses ever since she was a young teen.

"When I tested positive for HIV, I lost all hope," the Ugandan woman said. "I had so many thoughts about my children. If I died, where would they go? Who would take care of them?"

"Then, one day, hope came to my house."



Saidat Makop looks healthy, but within her body she has the HIV virus. She invited the Baptist program Words of Hope to her home to share about health issues, but they brought more than vitamins. They brought hope in Christ.

Enock Kategaya and Nabeth Atusasire sit under the shade tree in Makop's yard. The two counselors from the HIV clinic in Mbarara talk easily with this mother about the physical and social aspects of her health problems. Like most HIV programs, they check up on her medicines and talk about healthy living.

Then, the conversation takes a turn that distinguishes these counselors from other organizations. They talk in-depth about a God who forgives.

Makop looks up, surprised. For the first time in months, a small flicker of hope stirs deep within her. A devout Muslim for years, Makop invites the counselors to return. She wants to learn more about forgiveness.

Kategaya and Atusasire are from a Baptist organization called Words of Hope. A group of Ugandan Baptists and [International Mission Board](#) workers visit the homes of those who come to the HIV clinic in Mbarara. They educate people about HIV and eating healthy, and they share the gospel.

Grassroots programs like this one have been credited to help Uganda reduce infection rates. In the 1990s, HIV prevalence was estimated to be around 14 percent. A well-timed public campaign by the Ugandan government and church organizations, combined with the disease's natural

leveling-out, brought the prevalence rates down to 7 percent in 2005, according to UNAIDS reports.

Even though HIV prevalence in Uganda is much lower than it once was, it still remains high, and AIDS still claims more than 91,000 lives each year.

Kategaya said one of the reasons organizations like Words of Hope works is that it has Ugandans educating their peers.



Millions of children have been orphaned by AIDS or heavily affected by the multiple impacts of AIDS on their families and communities.

“This is something that has to be tackled from a Ugandan perspective,” Kategaya said. “We sit with our clients in their homes. We try to break down the stigma that goes with HIV/AIDS, not just with education but by

our presence.”

The Baptist program reaches out to clients who live within a 25-kilometer-radius of the clinic. They care for their clients’ physical and spiritual needs, concentrating on offering words of hope as their name implies. A church and several Bible studies have started from these home visits. In this small area alone, Words of Hope counselors visit hundreds of clients like Makop, offering a new life in Christ.

Makop sits waiting under the shade tree with the Bible the Words of Hope counselors gave her. This time, she is not alone when Kategaya and Atusasire arrive. Several friends and neighbors also want to hear about forgiveness and how to live a healthy lifestyle.

“You should see how the lives here have changed,” Kategaya said proudly after months teaching Bible lessons under the tree. “People are healthier because we’ve taught them to eat fruits and vegetables.

“People are forgiving their neighbors because they understand God forgave them,” he said. “People are coming to Christ here.”

Makop smiles shyly with Kategaya’s words. She explains that Words of Hope changed her own life. They introduced her to the hope she was looking for. She no longer goes to the mosque searching for answers; she looks in her Bible and prays.



Physically, life with HIV has not changed for Makop. She still tires faster than she did when she was healthy. She still wonders if she will live long enough to see her children become adults.

Spiritually, Makop is a different person. Her eyes shine bright with hope and a passion for her newfound faith.

“Because of Words of Hope, I now have hope in God,” the Ugandan mother said. “All my hope is now in God. I trust God to take care of my children when I am gone.

“All my trust is in God.”

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