
Yvonne: Hello - this is '6 minute English', I'm Yvonne Archer - and thanks to William Kremer for joining me today.

William: Hello Yvonne.

Yvonne: Hello William! Today, we hear from a very impressive South African man who used to think of himself as 'an academic' - but then his studies lead him to become 'an activist' within the area of HIV/AIDs. William, can you explain what 'an activist' is?

William: Yeah – of course. It's somebody who works to bring about political and social changes. That's 'an activist'.

Yvonne: Great. Well, before we find out more about that man I met up with in Cape Town, I've a question for you William. Are you ready?

William: Yes!

Yvonne: OK. Which country in Africa is generally thought of as a success story in terms of its battle against HIV and AIDS? Is it

- a) Uganda
- b) South Africa OR
- c) Gambia

William: Hmmm – I'm gonna go for a) Uganda.

Yvonne: Really?

William: Yeah – I've got a good feeling about that one.

Yvonne: OK - we'll find out whether you're right or wrong at the end of the programme. When I met up with Ralph Berold, he'd just finished his MBA- and we were celebrating! But Ralph had also studied History, Development and Politics. So, why did his studies turn him into an activist within the field of HIV/AIDs some years ago?

RALPH BEROLD

I felt that it was the most pressing sort of social public work to be done in the country.

Yvonne: William, what does Ralph mean by 'pressing' here?

William: Well, 'urgent' – Ralph felt that in South Africa, urgent work was needed to help people with HIV and AIDs immediately... This huge and important problem was 'pressing'.

Yvonne: So, rather than study the problem, Ralph became a part of the solution. He became manager of a non-profit organisation – a charity called Treatment Action Campaign - or TAC.

While Ralph was at TAC, a group of prisoners in a very large prison in Durban contacted the organisation for help. After discussing things with the prison services, Ralph and his team went to find out more from the prisoners themselves. About half of them were HIV positive or suffering from AIDs. As we hear from Ralph now, try to catch the three main problems that he found out about during his visit...

RALPH BIRALD

Overcrowding was a huge thing, you know, many people were dying in their cells – you know, looking after each other until the point of death. It was really a sad story.

- Yvonne:** William, what were the three main problems the prisoners were facing?
- William:** Well first, the prison was 'overcrowded' - so there were too many prisoners in each cell.
- Yvonne:** And Ralph told me how this lead to more prisoners getting TB - tuberculosis.
- William:** Prisoners were dying in their cells.
- Yvonne:** Yes, so the prisoners didn't have access to hospitals or to medicines, such as anti-retroviral drugs which are used to treat and prevent infections in people with HIV and AIDs. And finally?
- William:** And finally, the sick prisoners were looking after each other 'to the point of death' – right up until they died, so they didn't have any doctors or nurses.
- Yvonne:** Ralph also told me that although it was difficult spending time with people who'd often committed horrific crimes, it was important to remember that they were still people. So, Ralph and his team took the case to court on behalf of the prisoners and, the Department of Correctional Services - the prison services – were ordered to make doctors and medicines available to treat the sick prisoners.
- William:** Wow – that's an amazing result! And they brought about a real social change, didn't they?
- Yvonne:** They certainly did. And just as importantly perhaps, Ralph and his group also managed to help change attitudes towards this issue. But whose attitude did they change?

RALPH BEROLD

Just because they have some rights taken away from them as prisoners, this doesn't mean they don't have a right to life, for example. So, you know, government was therefore taking the issue a lot more seriously and actually made those medicines available - and these are life-saving medicines. So it was a very powerful time. Yeah.

William: They managed to change the attitude of the South African government - and politicians began to take the issue of HIV/AIDS in prisons a lot more seriously.

Yvonne: And Ralph Berold, the South African academic turned activist is, quite rightly, still very proud of that achievement.

OK, time for today's big question: Which country in Africa is generally thought of as a success story in terms of its battle against HIV and AIDS? And your answer William...

William: ...was Uganda.

Yvonne: And you're right!

William: Yeah!

Yvonne: Yes, they went from having about one third of the population infected with HIV/AIDS down to- today, they think it's about six percent.

William: Wow, that's another success story, isn't it?

Yvonne: Very much so. But that's all for today's "6 Minute English". Do join us again for more!

W/Y: Goodbye!