

The Challenge of Youth

Gaston-Pierre Coly

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Literacy and Non-formal Education Section
Division of Basic Education

Adapted from a booklet prepared at a national workshop
organized by UNESCO

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INTRODUCTION

Political leaders and development specialists around the world have recognised that illiteracy – particularly among women – seriously undermines their education and development efforts. Many believe there is a need to make literacy programmes more relevant, so that woman will remain in the programmes long enough to benefit fully from the skills and information they offer.

This post-literacy booklet is one of a growing series of learning materials produced under UNESCO-DANIDA's *Special Project for Women and Girls in Africa*. The series presents a sample of the products of the regional and national workshops which UNESCO organised between 1997 and 2000 in Africa.

During these two-week workshops, African women and men involved in literacy work were introduced to the concept of gender sensitivity and the idea of addressing gender equity issues through basic education. Before the workshops began, they selected their target communities and carried out needs assessments. By analysing these assessments at the workshops, each group established a list of the priority issues to be addressed in the booklets. Each writer worked on his or her chosen topic with the support and advice of peers, the workshop facilitators and other resource persons. Local illustrators then illustrated the texts with simple line drawings.

The Literacy and Non-formal Education Section of the Division of Basic Education at UNESCO edited the text and prepared the design-layout for the final product which will be distributed worldwide.

Though the booklets are intended for use with neo-literate women and out-of-school girls, the messages in these stories, and the radio programme scripts that accompany them, are also relevant for use as supplementary reading materials in formal schools for readers of both sexes.

The subjects of the booklets, based on the needs assessments, reflect a wide range of needs and conditions of women in Africa – from Senegal to Kenya, from Mali to South Africa, from Niger to Malawi. Over the course of this project, a list of common concerns has emerged. These include: HIV-AIDS, domestic violence, the exploitation of girls employed as domestic servants, the lack of positive role models for women and girls, the economic potential of women through small business development, the negative consequences of child marriage, and the need for a more equal division of labour between men and women in the home.

Each booklet depicts one way of treating a subject of high priority to African women. In the process, the authors have attempted to render the material gender-sensitive. They have tried to present African women and girls and their families in an African context, and portray the issues and problems from their perspective.

We hope these booklets will inspire readers, as they did their authors, to reflect on some of the life situations, problems and issues that ordinary women and men face every day. The questions that accompany the booklets will help readers ask questions and find answers to issues that effect them in everyday life. The ways in which characters in these booklets cope with specific situations, rising above their trials and tribulations, could serve as lessons for women and men living together in 21st Century Africa.

Michael and Rose were born in the same village, Nias-sa-rang, and have known one another for a long time.



Like most of the young people there, they left the village to go and work in Dakar.

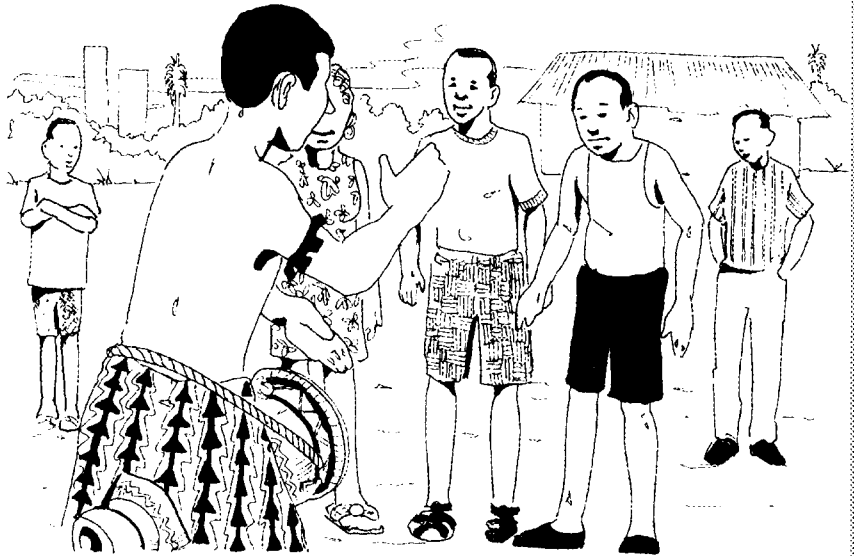
**There, they lived in the same district -
Grand Yoff.**



**This district is the liveliest and most
popular of Dakar.**

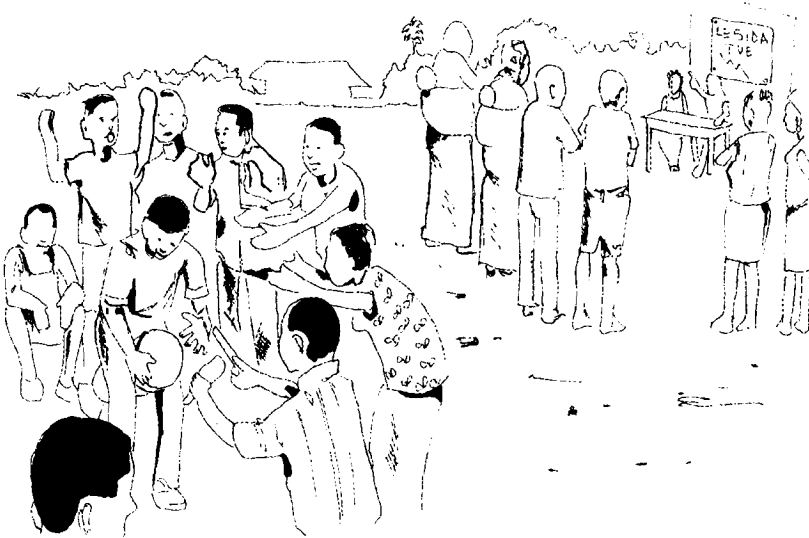
Michael and Rose were lucky - they both found jobs.

In the evenings, after work, they would meet in Michael's room.



Saturdays were for going out.

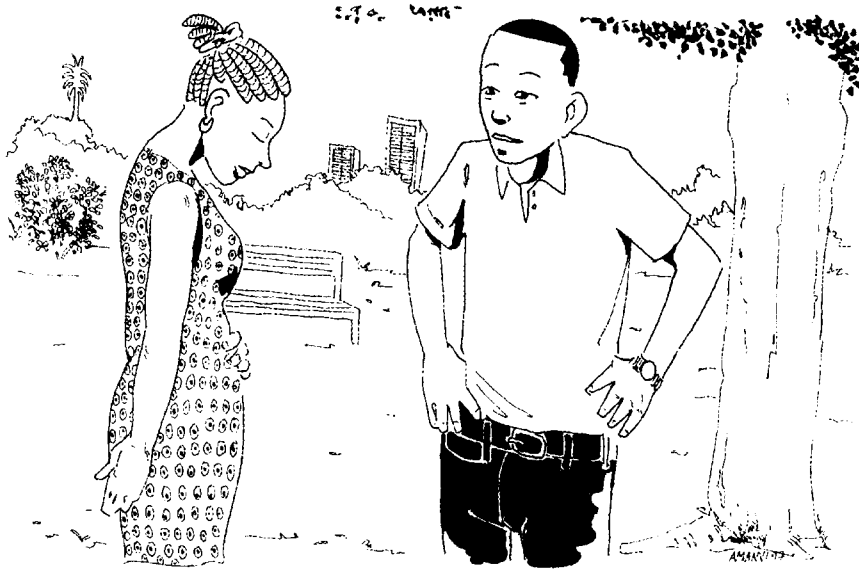
**Michael and Rose joined the others.
They went to bars or parties, drinking
and dancing to the sound of the tam-
tam until all hours of the night.**



**At the community centre, there were
information meetings on illnesses, such
as AIDS.**

**But Michael, Rose and their friends
were not interested in them.**

**A few months later...
Rose came home from work in tears
and went to find her friend Michael.**



**Her boss had discovered that she was
four months pregnant.**

**So Rose could no longer work.
She stayed at home, cleaning and
tidying the common room.**

This was her contribution to the rent.



**As Rose got bigger, the work became
harder. Stuck at home, she often felt
depressed and lonely.**

In addition, Michael stopped coming to see her.

He found a new girlfriend, Louise.



Rose was miserable. She felt so used.

On Saturdays, while Michael and Louise were out partying, Rose stayed home alone.

One day, while urinating, Michael felt a burning pain. It didn't go away.

He found out that he had syphilis.



Syphilis is a disease that people get from having unprotected sex.

Fortunately, it's a disease that can be cured.

Michael went to the local clinic. The doctor agreed to treat him – but on the condition that he also treat all of Michael's girlfriends.

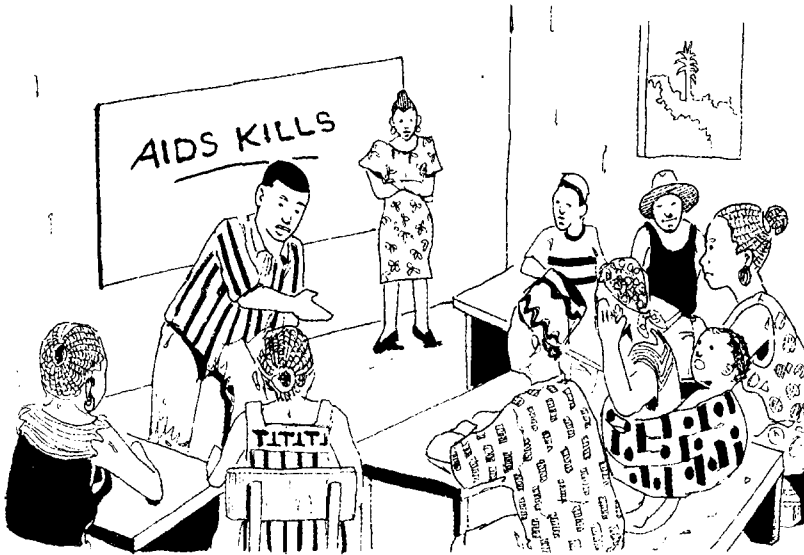
It wasn't easy for Michael to tell this to Louise and Rose. He was ashamed. He had to scare them to get them to go back to the clinic with him.

After days of treatment, Michael, Rose and Louise were cured. The doctor insisted they attend a family planning presentation for youth.



At the meeting, they realised how lucky they were. With the way Michael was sleeping around, they could have gotten AIDS. They could all have died!

In the next few months, Michael and Rose kept running in to each other at the centre. In class, they talked with other young people about the terrible risks they had taken.



They learned that they must use a condom every time they have sex. Otherwise, they could get very sick, become infertile, and if they get AIDS, even die.

They came to understand that protection, by using condoms, is best. But they also learned why it is so important to go to the clinic for treatment as soon as possible if they think they have one of these diseases.



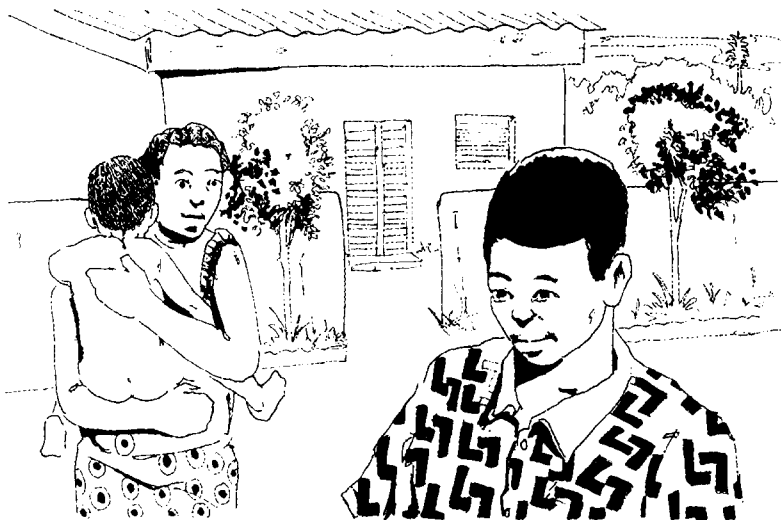
They continued to take classes at the centre because they were so useful, and even fun. Rose sometimes brought the baby and Michael could see that she was a good mother. He couldn't help feeling proud of her.

The organisers were impressed with Rose too. They picked her to be trained to teach some of the classes. Michael was even more proud, and asked if he could assist.



Together, they planned the presentations to teach young people about the diseases they could catch from having sex without condoms and the problem of unwanted pregnancies.

This activity brought Rose and Michael together.



They finally got married, and now share not only their baby but also their enthusiasm for their work.

Questions

1. How do the young people in Dakar spend their free time?
2. In the beginning of the story, why aren't Michel and Rose interested in the information meetings at the community centre?
3. What did Rose's boss do when he found out she was pregnant? Was it fair? Why or why not?
4. What did Michel do? Is his reaction to Rose's pregnancy typical of men in your village? What kind of life does Michel have?
5. How did Rose spend her time after she lost her job? How do you think she felt about the way her life changed after she got pregnant?
6. What would you have done if you were Rose?
7. Is it safe to sleep with many partners at the same time?
8. Who is more at risk from unprotected sex? Men or women?
9. How can girls like Rose and Louise protect themselves from getting pregnant or catching diseases like AIDS?
10. How do you think Louise felt in the end of the story?