

For immediate release
Johannesburg, 13 July 2020

CHANGING THE FUTURE FOR YOUNG AFRICANS THROUGH SEXUAL HEALTH INNOVATION **Five finalists announced in the ‘Aspire, Higher’ Wits student competition**

Wits Business School (WBS), Reckitt Benckiser (RB) and its Durex brand, Gilead, and UNAIDS are pleased to announce the five finalists in the inaugural “Aspire, Higher” sexual health innovation competition for students. The three winners will be chosen on 16 July 2020.

“Aspire, Higher” was created to tackle the high number of new HIV infections in young South African women. In sub-Saharan Africa, young women and adolescent girls accounted for one in four new infections in 2019, despite making up approximately 10% of the total population.¹ In addition, 62.67% of the 7.5-million adults in South Africa living with HIV are women.²

To make a positive and lasting difference to the lives of these women and girls, Wits students have developed new ideas to improve sexual health in South Africa. This is the first year that the competition has run.

- The five shortlisted projects will be assessed on 16 July by judges including HIV activist and YouTuber Saïdy Brown; Director of UNAIDS (RST ESA) Aeneas Chuma; Chancellor of Wits University Dr Judy Dlamini; and host of *Sex Talk with Dr T*, Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng
- The moderator for the day is Redi Tlhabi, the popular South African journalist and author
- The three winning projects will receive a share of R2.14-million (£100,000), provided by RB and Durex, to conduct 12-month field trials of their winning ideas
- The project delivering the highest level of behaviour change in these trials will receive a further R2.14 million (£100,000) grant from pharmaceutical company Gilead to scale up and implement the initiative

Wits Professor Bhekinkosi Moyo, Director of the school’s Centre on Philanthropy and Social Investment (CAPSI), comments: *“The calibre of the finalists in the “Aspire, Higher” competition demonstrates the high sense of citizenship and social responsibility of our students here at WBS. We seek to be a catalyst for innovation and community engagement, and the funding that the winning projects will receive will make a tangible impact on the lives of young people in our country.”*

Director of UNAIDS (RST ESA), Aeneas Chuma, says: *“No country can reach its development goals without empowering women, and in many African countries they constitute more than half of the population. Investing in women’s economic empowerment sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth. African countries need to adopt and implement regional and national plans, legislations, policies, strategies, budgets and justice mechanisms in order to strengthen women’s economic empowerment.”*

RB's Global Category Director for Sexual Wellbeing, and one of the judges, Ben Wilson comments: *"This exciting initiative with Wits Business School complements our existing 'Keeping Girls in School' partnership in South Africa, which we began in 2018. Both projects empower young women to take control of their health and their lives. I am looking forward to hearing the students' ideas for tackling this pressing sexual health issue."*

Gilead's Mampedi Bogoshi, Senior Director Medical Affairs (Sub-Saharan Africa), comments: *"Gilead is honoured to be part of the innovative approach provided by the "Aspire, Higher" project to address the disproportionately affected population of women and adolescent girls. Although new HIV infections are declining, there is still much work to be done in addressing sexual health education, access to health care and economic empowerment to have a sustainable impact. This can only be done through partnerships, engagement, innovation and active youth participation."*

OVERVIEW OF SHORTLISTED PROJECTS

Imbokodao LaunchPad

Developed by Jazman Simelane from Daveytown, East Rand, Imbokodao LaunchPad seeks to challenge the negative mindset and behaviour that increases the prevalence of HIV in South Africa. Proposed activities include:

- An out-of-school time programme
- Creative, sports and adventure opportunities for young people
- A business hub to assist women entrepreneurs to transform their communities

Storm

Proposed by Dinah Natto, a management consultant; Jane Rossouw, a social consultant; and Theko Thamaga, a social worker, the project aims to help girls make wiser and more informed decisions about their sexual relationships. The group recognised that cell phones are an under-utilised but effective platform for disseminating the HIV prevention message, particularly in the current Covid-19 circumstances. Taking My World by Storm will utilise social media and an SMS subscription service to provide effective sexual health education. The programme will be complemented by an in-school education service, community outreach and provision of sanitary protection and condoms via a social marketing campaign.

Aganang Youth Educational & Skills Academy

Vincent Hlatshwayo is studying for a PhD in virology, researching a vaccine for HIV. The Aganang Youth Educational & Skills Academy aims to be a safe space for girls and young women utilising the popularity of social media to provide sexual education in an engaging format. Members of the academy will be incentivised to share content with friends and social media contacts with the opportunity to win prizes related to education, lifestyle and career enhancement. Additional activities will include making access to high quality condoms easier and community stakeholder engagement.

GirlLead

GirlLead aims to empower girls at every level by reducing unplanned pregnancies and HIV and supporting young women to be economically empowered and community focused. It

has been developed by MBA students, Mahlogondo Mashile and Nolukhanyo Mqhayi, both of whom have an engineering background. GirlLead comprises:

- A mentorship programme to support young women to become prominent leaders in their society
- The Competent Communicator Programme, which promotes communication and public speaking with a focus on HIV
- The Academic Excellence Programme, which aims to make education fashionable

The Gratitude Project

Ditebogo Rametse, an established entrepreneur, Letlhogonolo Tsoai and Lebogang Rametse are proposing The Gratitude Project, which will empower girls to change their story through education, entrepreneurship and wellness. Using yoga and a WhatsApp Academy, the project will provide young women with the resources to make positive life choices. The project includes:

- A digital leadership academy focused on starting and accelerating businesses through inspiring content and access to entrepreneurs
- Financial education to support both business and domestic budgeting
- Sexual health and wellness education through yoga and daily affirmations

ENDS

Notes to editors:

To attend the virtual judging showcase, please register [here](#).

For media enquiries, please contact

Jane Balnaves

Communication Manager: WBS

Jane.balnaves@wit.ac.za

¹UNAIDS, 2020. Seizing The Moment: Tackling Entrenched Inequalities To End Epidemics. Global Aids Update. p.6. Available at: https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/2020_global-aids-report_en.pdf [Accessed 9 July 2020]

²Unaid.org. 2018. South Africa. Available at: <https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/southafrica> [Accessed 9 July 2020]