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Nigerian Activists Teach Sexual Rights, Awareness, Safety

<p>Heather Murdock</p>

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After attending the international AIDS conference in Washington, D.C., Nigerian youth leaders are trying hard to bring home and apply what they learned.

Many young men and women at a hotel in Abuja wear brightly colored badges made from condoms. Others wear strips of plastic condom packages safety-pinned to their shirts.

While a colleague carefully tapes blue and pink fabric to a condom to complete another badge, Charles Onwuka, the Abuja program coordinator for activist group Our Right Our Life, said condoms are the first line of defense against HIV/AIDS. He said Nigerians are squeamish, and often do not even like to talk about them.

Most people are shy to even touch condoms. But you can see many people are wearing condoms. It does not hurt. It will not bite you. So you can carry condoms, use condoms when it is necessary to use them, said Onwuka.

The national coordinator of the organization, Oyedemi Folayan, said he attended the international HIV/AIDS conference in Washington, D.C., this summer. His group is working to emulate awareness campaigns they saw in the United States, and to build their network of activists against HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.

Folayan said the "Our Right Our Life" group seeks to educate young Nigerians about what he called sexual rights. For instance, he said, many young women do not believe they have the right to refuse sexual advances or demand the use of a condom.

A lot of youth in Nigeria are not aware of their sexual rights due to poverty, lack of orientation about sexual reproductive health, due to no exposure," said Folayan.

On the other side of the conference room, women conduct HIV blood tests with hundreds of takers. Health officials say 80 percent of Nigerians do not know their HIV status, despite the fact about 3 million people in the country are known to be HIV-positive.

[See the topic on aegis.org](http://aegis.org)