

ABIA criticizes a FIFA sponsored manual on HIV/AIDS prevention

The Brazilian Interdisciplinary AIDS Association (ABIA) issued a public note strongly criticizing “The Manual of the Coach” (for health prevention), elaborated by FIFA in partnership with Brazilian government, because it preconizes a conservative and regressive approach to the response to prevention HIV/AIDS. The material has been distributed to teachers of the public school system in the cities that will host the World Cup next June-July. Among other "recommendations", the manual proposes sexual abstinence and fidelity as measures of HIV prevention, reviving the widely criticized approach adopted by the Bush administration in the last decade.

The Brazilian Interdisciplinary AIDS Association (ABIA) strongly deplores the content of the “Manual of the Coach”, prepared by FIFA with the support of the Ministries of Health, Education and Sports. The material, which has been distributed to elementary school teachers in the host cities of the World Cup, constitutes a flagrant setback in the policy debate on HIV and AIDS in Brazil.

The content of the manual indicates that FIFA experts have a conservative view on HIV and AIDS, as it recommends elementary school professors to teach children the value of sexual abstinence and fidelity to the uninfected partner as prevention strategies. It also uses an inappropriate and disrespectful language in relation to persons living with HIV when it associates the words "Play Clean" with "healthy" practices in the realm of HIV/AIDS prevention. This language revives the tone of coercive campaigns enhanced in the early days of the epidemic. In other words, the material alludes to HIV and HIV infection as something "dirty", by there disrespecting experience and the human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. This unfortunate approach triggers prejudice, stigmatization and social exclusion. It is really unfortunate to learn that the Brazilian government has authorized the distribution of this manual as part of the *Fifa 11 Health Program* whose declared objective is, ironically, the promotion of a "serious program of health education".

In light of these distortions, ABIA reaffirms the position expressed in the article "The legacy of FIFA in health and education" that was published by the Polytechnic School of Health Joaquim Venâncio (linked to the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation), which had a wide media repercussion. We also reiterate our outrage in relation to the fact that an entity such as FIFA can have the authorization and "autonomy" to disseminate an educational material already used in 2010 in South Africa World Cup, which is at odds with the human rights perspective infirming the Brazilian HIV/AIDS policy response since the 1990's and that disregards the cultural, political and social peculiarities of the country.

Furthermore, although, according to the Ministry of Health, the costs of this health promotion program is exclusively assumed by FIFA, ABIA questions the use of public funds that are necessarily implied in the involvement of local governments in the initiative, if nothing else because it includes the salaries of teachers that the program will engage. We recommend these local resources and precious time of teachers and students to be better utilized if this type of program would rely on culturally appropriate, politically progressive and evidence based educational materials, produced by experts knowledgeable of the history and good results of HIV/AIDS prevention in Brazil.

We also emphasize that adding an errata to the material – the measure adopted by the Department of HIV/AIDS to rebalance the FIFA approach - will not have the necessary social impact to curtail the potentially detrimental effects of the manual. Consequently, ABIA – which since 1986 has focused on and monitored the HIV/AIDS public health response in Brazil - strongly recommends that the material be withdrawn from circulation. It also calls attention to the fact that HIV/AIDS has been losing relevance in the national health policy debates and that

other regrettable signs of regression can be detected in the realm of the response to the epidemics, most of them reflecting the growing influence of dogmatic religious forces and other conservative voices on high policy levels.