

# 2007 Sexuality Institute Silent Sexualities: Desire, love and constructive wellness

*October 28th - 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2007*

**Population Council  
Africa regional Sexuality Resource Centre**

## **Background**

The Sexuality Institute 2007 will be held the **Serena Beach Hotel Mombasa, Kenya, from October 28<sup>th</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2007**. The Institute is designed to strengthen African intellectual resources to re-think sexuality research and actions by way of balancing a concern for disease with issues of positive sexuality including desire, love and wellness.

In recent years, there has been mounting concern by researchers, policy makers, technical assistance agencies and donors about the predominantly problem-centred meaning attached to sexuality in research, policy and programming in Sub-Saharan Africa. This concern has subsequently yielded renewed effort at searching for broader definitional approaches to sexuality. In response to this, WHO/Global offered some direction to guide programming and various actions. Sexuality was defined to encompass sex, gender, identities and roles, sexual orientation, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality was also described as something that is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, values, behavior, practices, roles and relationships.<sup>1</sup> In relation to sexuality, WHO emphasized that sexual health is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity, but rather a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being and that addressing sexual health required a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships.

In a sustained effort to create constructive meanings and understandings around sexuality, the Ford Foundation also organized a workshop on thinking about sexuality in Kenya: priorities for strategy, in 2004.<sup>2</sup> Participants at the workshop reflected upon issues of sexuality and how they carry this forward within their programmes and research. Emerging from this workshop was the fact that sexuality issues were addressed mainly under the umbrella of health, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and violence against women. While these areas legitimized the relevance and importance of working with the concept of sexuality, there was a tendency to frame sexuality as a threat to health and wellbeing.

Again in 2005, the Ford Foundation supported the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) to fill the gaps around the theoretical conceptualization of sexuality. Among activities carried out by APHRC was a synthesis of literature on sexuality in Africa and a workshop on theorizing sexuality. These activities culminated into a working paper

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<sup>1</sup> WHO (2002) Sexual health definitions, Geneva, World Health Organization.

<sup>2</sup> Jacinta Muteshi Ford Foundation Workshop report on Thinking about sexuality in Kenya: Priorities for Strategy. 5<sup>th</sup> July 2004.

on “The State of Knowledge on Sexuality in Sub-Saharan Africa.”<sup>3</sup> This paper highlighted that the urgent need to stem disease has necessitated an almost exclusive focus on behaviour change, limiting a fuller understanding of sexuality and how it is conceptualized and applied in Africa. Sexuality continues to be conceptualized as a disease problem and therefore tends to embrace a limited number of themes, including disease (risk) and reproduction. As such, programs have been predominantly designed to respond to the negative constitutions of sexuality. Balancing the concern for disease and the more positive realities of sexuality, which are equally an important part of life and wellness in SSA, remains a challenge.

Moreover, research which is expected to inform programming and policy actions has tended to be narrowly defined; not asking all the right questions, such as how desire or sexuality may be a source of happiness, personal fulfillment and well-being. Research continues to question sexuality or to assess risky sexual behavior and practices to the neglect of other vital elements of well being and personal sexual fulfillment. The reality remains that conventional negative constitutions of sexuality attract the most research and programmatic funding.

The vision for the 2007 sexuality institute represents the logical next step in entrenching a framework for engaging with the “positives” of sexuality in East Africa. While the previous Ford-funded initiatives in the region confirmed the existence of major gaps and weaknesses in the conceptualization of sexuality, more concrete and strategic actions are needed to ensure that the gains made in stimulating research, programming and funding interest in sexuality as a broader concept are crystallized, supported and sustained.

## **The aim of the 2007 Sexuality Institute**

The 2007 sexuality institute, thus, seeks to:

- Provide a forum for health professionals (researchers, programmers, policy makers, and donors) in Africa to dialogue, share ideas, generate new knowledge and approaches, to inform a constructive sexuality engagement and agenda;
- Identify and promote potential actions in supporting positive sexualities.
- Build a constituency of “change agents” to stimulate actions towards entrenching a positive sexualities framework in the region.

This year’s Institute draws on the recognition that Africans as individuals, sick or not, have sexual desires and make conscious choices and effort in seeking meaningful sexual relationships as a way of contributing to their wellness. As such, love and intimacy are part and parcel of wellness. Thus, the Institute will discuss themes covering experiences and desires that go beyond the physical to the emotional expressions of sexuality. The Institute seeks to challenge the predominant medical discourse on sexuality and explore how research and programmes need to change in order for them to contribute to the achievement of satisfying sexual lives and greater well-being.

## **Participants**

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<sup>3</sup> Chi-Chi Undie & Kabwe Benaya 2005, The State of Knowledge on Sexuality in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Synthesis of Literature. African Population & health research Center, Working Papers. No.34.

To amplify discourse on sexuality in the region, the Institute intends to attract “**change agents**” as participants. The “change agents” will be deans of faculties, researchers, program managers from public health institutions who seem ready to embrace new ideals and thinking. They will be expected to provide leadership and act as stimuli for redressing research and programmatic gaps and imbalances on sexualities. They will also be expected to contribute to opening up spaces for greater openness about sexuality within their own settings.

We do observe that the meaning and creative thinking around sexuality has been constrained by funding and donor ideologies. As a means of widening the constituency of interests, this year’s institute will include donors, as well. This is part of a strategy to start engaging with them and to draw their attention and interest toward supporting a constructive sexuality agenda. Through this dialoging, we anticipate that the institute will enable actors to engage donors on desirable and potential funding undertakings to address research and programmatic gaps around sexuality, in general.

## **Organization of the Institute**

The 2007 Sexuality Institute is organized around four broad sessions: 1) conceptualizing sexuality 2) Sexuality in various scenarios; 3) Moving the discussion to wellness, and 4) Strategic actions: programming, research, publication and networking. Each session will be facilitated by at least two resource persons. The sessions will be participatory. Each session will have specific objectives and pointers, and reference materials, and expected outcomes. All the sessions will be collated into a course module. A half-day sexuality symposium will be organized after the institute to refine some of the papers presented for publishing in journal of Culture, Health and Sexuality. The Institute is facilitated by various experts in the field of sexuality.

The 2007 sexuality Institute is funded by the Ford Foundation and Population Council and organized through a collaborative effort of:

- Population Council
- Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre
- African Population and Health Research Center
- Liverpool VCT

## **Venue**

To ensure a productive and worry free engagement on sexuality, the 2007 Sexuality Institute will be held at **Mombasa Serena Beach Hotel**. Stretching along Shanzu Beach, a ribbon of palm-fringed golden sand, chosen long ago by the local turtles to lay their eggs, and with the clear blue waters of the Indian Ocean spanning out before it, the Mombasa Serena offers the ultimate in escapism. Amidst bougainvillea-filled gardens and shaded by palm trees, this stunning resort blends indigenous architecture and materials with the highest standard of modern hospitality. A member of “*Club Best Hotels of the World*”, the hotel is set out as a village and it’s luxurious bedrooms evoke the spirit and style of the ancient town of Lamu with its stunning Swahili-style houses complete with hand-crafted doors and native art and furnishings. For more information please visit SerenaHotels website:

[www.serenahotels.com](http://www.serenahotels.com)

## **Requirements for Application:**

Applicants are requested to submit the following:

1. *Letter of application (about 600 words)* stating how the applicant intends to contribute to bridging research and/or programmatic gap and imbalance in sexuality. The letter should also indicate where the applicant got the sexuality Institute announcement for the first time.
2. *Curriculum Vitae*: Each applicant is expected to submit detailed curriculum vitae showing clearly the applicant's research, publications, awards or any other activities attesting to their competence and achievements in their area of work.

***Deadline for the Receipt of Applications: All application and other documentary requirements should sent email to both of the addresses below by 24 September 2007 .***

*The 2007 Sexuality Institute*  
**POPULATION COUNCIL Nairobi**  
Email: [hbirungi@pcnairobi.org](mailto:hbirungi@pcnairobi.org)

*And*

*The 2007 Sexuality Institute*  
*Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre*  
**17 Lawal St., off Oweh St., Jibowu, PO Box 803, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.**  
**Tel: 234-1-7919307 / Fax No: 234-1-3425470**  
E-mail [opportunities@arsrc.org](mailto:opportunities@arsrc.org)

***Selection: Notification of the result of the selection will be made by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2007***