

# THE Skanner®

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# Opinion

## Why Ending AIDS in Africa Matters to Black Americans

**W**orld AIDS Day (December 1) is fast approaching and a recently launched initiative aimed at ending HIV/AIDS, as a public health crisis in Africa, could be a catalyst to trigger discussions about HIV in the African American and African diaspora communities in the United States.

In recent months, several African heads of state have made public their commitment to support the goal of ending AIDS by 2030. In September, six African heads of state joined UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé at the "HIV Fast Track" side event organized during the 72nd United Nations General Assembly that was held in New York City and presided over by President Yoweri of Uganda. Earlier in July, during the African Union (AU) Summit, AU Chair, President Alpha Conde of Guinea convened the "AIDS Watch Africa Heads of State and Government Meeting" where the leaders endorsed the "Catch-Up Plan for West and Central Africa" and declared their commitment to providing the needed policy and resource changes to help achieve the target goals.



**Dr. Djibril Diallo**  
Reg. Dir.  
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The Catch-Up Plan is an 18-month initiative that has been developed to accelerate the AIDS response and prevent a resurgence of the HIV epidemic in the 25-country region. Its focus is on testing, knowing one's HIV status, treatment, and prevention

**"** Black Americans need to get more involved in the global fight against HIV/AIDS

of mother-to-child transmission; the initiative was crafted to complement existing health plans that the countries have been using to address HIV and AIDS.

Today, thanks to advancements in medicine and increased access to antiretroviral medications for many

people in Africa and around the world, being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS is no longer a death sentence. In so many cases, with treatment the disease can be managed like a chronic illness and kept under long-term control with medication.

However, at a time when the global response to HIV is accelerating, millions of people in Western and Central Africa are being left behind. There is a considerable gap when it comes to people knowing their HIV status, and for those who test positive to receive the necessary treatment.

The same can be said for the populations most vulnerable to the disease in the United States, as well.

Many of the issues that continue to fuel the HIV/AIDS crisis on the continent are also the root cause for the high infection rates found in African American and Hispanic populations in the U.S. including some of the same barriers keep people from seeking to know their HIV status, having access to treatment and properly following up on treatment namely poverty, fear, stigma and discrimination.

On both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, the HIV/AIDS mir-

ror reflects the same faces: the young, the poor, women, high-risk populations, as well as children. In the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, Ga., reported that "African Americans continue to experience the greatest burden of HIV compared to other races and ethnicities." In 2015, data released earlier this year, the CDC noted that African Americans who represent around 12 percent of the U.S. population, but account for 40 percent of all people living with HIV/AIDS and nearly 45 percent "of all persons with newly diagnosed infection." Latinos, who represent around 17 percent of the U.S. population, account for nearly 21 percent of people living with HIV and an estimated 24 percent of all persons with newly diagnosed infection.

The Catch-Up Plan for West and Central Africa initiative can serve as the entry point for talking about HIV/AIDS and related health issues in Africa globally and in particular, as it concerns African American and African Diaspora communities in the US.

**Dr. Djibril Diallo** is the UNAIDS Director of the Regional Support Team for West and Central Africa.

## Why We Need More Black Men in Early Childhood Education

**A**s educators, we have an obligation to give our students every opportunity to succeed. Parents rely on us to ensure their children are armed with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive, once they leave our classrooms. Over my more than 15 years in education, I have learned that to fulfill this responsibility, schools must give children the opportunity to learn from men of color. The profound impact Black male educators can have on the trajectory of a child's life cannot be overstated and it's time that we acknowledge it.

### Promoting Diversity

According to the U.S. Department of Education, less than two percent of our nation's teachers are Black males. At a time when non-White students outnumber White students in U.S. public schools, the need for a diverse teaching force has never been greater. At Eagle Academy Public Charter School, diversity is something we not only celebrate, but aggressively pursue. We constantly look for ways to expose our students to different experiences, perspectives and methods for coping with challenges. And this starts with diverse educators.

It should come as no surprise that men and women bring different perspectives



**Royston Maxwell Lytle**  
Principal,  
Eagle Academy

to the classroom, and the same is true for individuals of varying backgrounds and ethnicities. It is crucial that schools cultivate a diverse and stable environment to facilitate this development, especially in early education, where chil-

**"** I have seen firsthand that when children learn and grow in a diverse community, they begin to challenge stereotypes

dren develop the foundation for the rest of their lives. I have seen firsthand that when children learn and grow in a diverse community, they begin to challenge stereotypes that have, for far too long, prevented children from reaching their full potential.

### Shattering Stereotypes

Today, early childhood education is still widely viewed as a woman's profession. With men representing only 2.5 percent of preschool and kindergarten teachers and 21.5 percent of elementary and middle school teachers, the chances of having a male

educator (let alone a Black male educator) before reaching high school are slim.

The environment children are exposed to in their first years of education has a profound impact on how they view the world. Therefore, there should be a sense of urgency among early educators to combat stereotypes. When children see a diverse teaching staff working together in the same profession, they not only learn the importance of equality, but are also encouraged to ignore gender

and racial stereotypes associated with certain careers. As a Black man working in early education, I have seen how these societal constructs negatively affect children and I have dedicated my life to breaking them down.

### Offering a Role Model

Role models play a critical role in a child's development. Young boys who come from disadvantaged backgrounds may not have a strong father figure at home, and often come to school hoping to fill that void. As a leader of a 98 percent African American student body, I feel it is im-

portant for students to find someone they can see themselves in, look up to, and aspire to be.

Boys who grow up with only female teachers and role models don't have this opportunity. Children tend to mimic influential individuals in their lives. They benefit from strong, Black male teachers who lead by example. This is something I learned from a student while working in Washington, D.C.

He was a young boy whose behavioral issues were hindering his ability to learn. Without a father figure in his life, his mother was struggling to get through to him. Upon sitting down with the boy in hopes of identifying the root of these problems, I was surprised to find he had just one request: to spend time together. After our first outing to the movies, his attitude and schoolwork improved dramatically. I didn't have to employ any complicated learning tactic or psychological theory to help this child — I just had to be there and listen. Over the remainder of the year, I watched him grow into a successful and happy student. That experience left me determined to be someone my students can always rely on and look up to inside and outside of the classroom.

Read the rest of this commentary at **TheSkanner.com**