

## Polytechnic Debate Tournament Interview September 21, 2012



Polytechnic debate winners: PAO Anthony Deaton joins the debaters from the University of Namibia, who placed first at the September 19 debating championship grand finale.

### Event Overview

The U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Office, through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), awarded a grant to the Polytechnic of Namibia to host and administer a debating championship, which aimed to raise awareness about the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic while promoting intellectual debate and enriching the minds of Namibia's future leaders. About 80 debaters from three universities and three area high schools participated in the four-day contest. Participants debated critical and often controversial HIV/AIDS policy issues including whether condoms should be distributed at schools, if HIV-positive individuals should be allowed to serve in the military, and whether HIV/AIDS should be a notifiable disease.

The championship's grand finale – a gala event that included singing, traditional dance and poetry – took place September 19 at the Polytechnic before an audience of 200 students, administrators and U.S. Embassy personnel. Debaters from the University of Namibia (UNAM) took first prize.



Polytech debate\_2<sup>nd</sup> place: PAO Anthony Deaton joins the Debaters from the Polytechnic of Namibia, who placed second at the championship's grand finale on September 19.

## Q&A

Following their victory, three members of UNAM's winning team – Josy Nghipandua, a second-year law student, Atty Mwafufya, a first-year psychology student, and Weslele Chikwililwa, a third-year law student, sat down with Kelly Mitchell-Clark of the Emergency Plan Coordination Office in Namibia to discuss their participation in the championship and its impact:

**Q: Did the fact that the debate focused on HIV/AIDS have particular appeal to you?**

A: (Josy) – I was shocked because I didn't know there was so much we could talk about regarding HIV/AIDS. There were so many emotions and we were alike they couldn't possibly not come up with another one for the questions – and they just kept coming! We actually covered an entire spectrum of issues that if we were just having a one-one conversation on HIV with friends we wouldn't even think were part of the discussion about HIV. For example, it was the first time that I knew HIV is a notifiable disease.

**Q: So the debate was a learning opportunity for all of you as well?**

A: (Atty) – Normally when you hear HIV and AIDS you just think “prevention, treatment – that's it. But when you have eight different debates on eight different things, you basically learn things you didn't learn at school and things we didn't even know existed around the issue. It was eye-opening.

**Q: There's a lot of talk about working toward an AIDS-free Generation and the fact that it is within sight. What do you think needs to be done to achieve this goal?**

Josy: I find this a very sensitive issue because my mom passed away because of HIV. And I can't walk around acting like it doesn't affect me because it does. But I also can't expect to be able to change everyone's life with my story. The only thing I could do when I was young and up until this point, is to basically make sure that I'm responsible for my attitude towards the virus and that I behave and that I'm safe and so that every other generation that comes after me at least can follow in that kind of footsteps and take precautions in order to be safe from (HIV/AIDS).

Atty: It's a group effort, I think, and one needs to play their part. It starts from you yourself being the change you want to see. Responsibility starts with you. It's really not hard to have protected sex or safe sex – it just takes a few minutes to grab a condom – or no sex at all. It's not going to be worth it in the long run.

**Q: Do you think young women of your generation can negotiate safer sex or ask or demand that their boyfriends and sex partners use protection?**

A: (Josy) -- There's too much reliance on your partner to use a condom or carry a condom. I tell my female friends, "Carry a condom with you if you know that you're going to have sex. If he doesn't want to wear it, you're not going to have sex and that's kind of the ultimatum that you set. You're not going to die if you don't have sex. When you get HIV, his body's not going to suffer from the effects of the virus, your body will."

Wesele: On the flip side, as much as young women have more agency, the trend I see is that I've seen is that women are more trusting of their partners, which also leads to a lot of problems. You don't know what he's doing outside your relationship, which a lot of young women often forget. There's a tendency with a lot of Black women that they don't feel the need to put themselves first in the relationship and I think that we need to bring about some sort of cultural change, so that they start to think of themselves as being important and deserving a relationship and undertaking whatever action they can to put themselves first.

We live in a society that is highly sexualized and I think for males my age and younger living positively is so important. Living positively means looking after yourself, participating in sports and a lot of other things, diversifying how you spend your time and taking your mind away from engaging in particularly risky behaviors.



Polytech debate trophies: The prizes awarded to participants at the Debating Championship on HIV/AIDS, which was organized by the Polytechnic of Namibia Debating Society, were purchased with a grant from the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs Office, through PEPFAR.