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THURSDAY (09/08/07)

If we talk of Voluntary Counselling and testing (VCT) it is a thing which involves each and every person on his / her own to know the status of the blood individually in as far as HIV / AIDS disease is concerned but this tends to be not so in some of other people be it couples or individuals or even those people who are in relationships.

I am saying this due to a certain story I captured in the past weeks when it was a week of Voluntary Counselling and Testing VCT in our country whereby most men who are in the family were forcing their wives for voluntary counselling and testing VCT so that if the wife goes and come back with the results in as far as HIV/AIDS disease is concerned in the wife's body then the husband will know again from the results of the wife.

That is if the wife comes with the results that she is negative, then the husband was happy too that him again is HIV negative without him going for voluntary counselling and testing VCT.

Again if the wife comes out with the results that she HIV positive then the husband will also take himself that he is HIV positive a thing which did not make here in my area unprofitable week which was set aside for free voluntary counselling and testing due to such kind of tendency where by most couples only women were going for voluntary counselling and testing.

However as I said earlier on what was happening in my area during this week it was not all the women who tolerate such kind of tendency some of the women could see the situation and realise that such kind of tendency can not help to know how the couple blood status is in as far as HIV is concerned and they could resist after they were demanded by their husband to go for the Voluntary Counselling and testing on behalf of the couple a thing which even myself I could see that it was true and very sensible since the blood status of one person from the couple could not determine the status of the blood in as far as HIV / AIDS is concerned for the whole couple unless both of them go for voluntary counselling and testing VCT.

Now this was how I captured one of these scenes which I was even so interested to write about in one of the couples around my one neighbouring village called Mandala a village which is Sub T/A Bwanali in Balaka district and almost three hundred metres away from my village Ngatume within the same sub T/A and again the same district.

It was on Thursday morning when I had an appointment with a certain man called Kosamu who owns an orchard and does sell several citrus fruits like lemons,

oranges and even tangerines. But on this day I did not go there for these kind of fruits but I went there to buy some bananas so that I should take them home for domestic use.

As I reached the village at the exact time on which we agreed around something past eleven I found out that nobody was at his home on that particular time and I asked myself several questions that is not that my time misleading me so that the time we agreed have already gone or is it that I am too fast before the time?

But still I made up my mind that I was totally on time and conducted that if he is out it must be temporarily since I was on time and on the very same day on which he gave me an appointment that I should come.

Just as I was still thinking about the whereabouts of this man, I saw a certain young lady in her late teens coming towards me.

And indeed she was coming to attend me since she just went straight into the man's kitchen and take a small chair which her wife used to sit on when she is cooking.

In no time she gave me the chair to sit on, she greeted me and I also greeted her back. Before I even started asking her the whereabouts of the owner of the house where we were sitting she cut me off and started asking me that are you the one who you made an appointment with my Uncle to buy some bananas?

In no time I answered yes I am! Indeed, I knew that if the young lady have mentioned the exact programme which I was there for, I must be exactly [correct] myself and that there were some message which the man which she said her Uncle had left with her to tell me hence I kept quiet and listen the next words.

She continued saying that the Uncle was out temporarily and he will be back in no time that is through my imagination however he left the message that before he comes back some body will come whom I made an appointment with to buy some bananas and he told me that I should tell that particular person that he should wait since he wont take much time she stopped there.

After she finished talking to me, I agreed that I will do as he left the message however I was so keen to know exactly where the young lady's uncle had gone if at all she could know anything about that? Indeed in no time I asked her.

But to my surprise, before she answered me she took a pause for a while and looked at me a made a smile then answered me that her uncle had gone to her young mother - that is her mother's younger sister - where there is some quarries in the family about HIV/AIDs disease!

Then again she laughed for a while and then stopped. From this point in time I concluded that I should not continue asking this young lady several questions concerning where her Uncle had gone since the way she was behaving after asked some questions to where her Uncle had gone, there were several reactions from her before she answers the questions a thing which I noted that she was not quite

conversant with the issue or that the issue was somehow sensitive to her in as far as she was reacting.

Still it was not the burying of the issue in my mind, but I thought it wise to wait for her uncle to come and ask him since he was at the scene and again bearing in mind that we will have enough time to talk to each other on the way to his orchard since he does not keep any fruit at his home, all sales are done at the orchard itself.

After staying for about one and half minutes with the young lady without talking to each other I thought it wise to realise her so that she should continue doing whatever she was doing at her mother's home before I came and I assured her that she should not get worried with me and that I will stay waiting for him and her Uncle comes.

But before she goes back home she asked me a question whether she should go and call him for me but I told her not to go and call him for me and again that she should not bother with will since I was to wait until he comes.

Then she left, back to her home. I stayed at the place for about ten minutes nobody to be seen coming from all directions I looked at my time it was now running to ten after noon and now I started feeling hungry but I could not do other wise since I already waited for a long period of time.

Then about two minutes later, I saw a man coming from a bit far from where I sat that could not realise whom he was but for sure I knew that he had seen that there is somebody on the veranda of his house since I could notice from that far that he was in a hurry.

In no time he reached to the extent that I could see him clearly and indeed noticed that he was the man I was waiting for by the name of Kosamu to make sure that he had realised me from the fat than myself, he started talking to me before he reached where I was sitting that I should forgive him since he made me to stay waiting for him for a long time a thing which I rejected that I was just arriving at the house and that he should not worry at all.

Then he took a seat next to me to greet each other before anything as we always do so in as far as our culture is concerned.

After greeting each other, there was no any need for me to introduce to him why I was there for neither him asking me why I was at his house at that particular hour each one of us already knew the programme.

The only thing he talked to me after we greet each other was to let me know where he had been and he told me exactly as his niece to me that he had gone to settle disputes over a quarrel concerning voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) in a family of Mr. And Mrs. Disimoni of the same village Nawangwa who happens to be his brother in-law since he married the man's sister a slight difference to the message her niece told me that her Uncle had gone to settle disputes over a quarrel on HIV/AIDS disease anyway all the same.

However he promised to tell me the whole issue after we had lunch on our way to his orchard to buy bananas since it was already lunch time.

Bearing in my mind that the man had just arrived than her wife who was not yet home at that time since they were together I knew that it will take along time for us waiting for lunch since we had to wait for his wife to prepare us lunch a thing which would take us an hour also while we were at the house a thing which would be bore some [boring] to me since I had already spent almost an hour at the house waiting for him hence I decided to reason with him that what if we go first at the orchard to have the bananas and then have the lunch on our way back just as another way of passing the time while waiting for the lunch a thing which he agreed and he told me to wait for a while to collect some tools to use at the orchard to cut the bananas a thing like a panga knife and a small knife.

In no time he came back while carrying the tools in his hand and he ordered me to leave. We started off to his orchard while he left the message that if his wife comes she must be aware that him and I have gone to the orchard and that she should keep some food for us.

As we were going I did not want to remind him about the issue where he went to settle though it was a very main issue was expecting from him to tell me regardless of all the issues we were talking on our way going to his orchard.

As if he knew what I was keenly expecting from him to tell me, he just started the issue on his own after a bit pause from other issues we were discussing before, a thing which I was happy with.

He started the issue by saying I think women can think [more] wisely than man! Then he passed for a while and in no time I asked him to clarify what he was trying to mean by saying such statement.

Then he continued saying, as I told you I went to my in-law house where there was a quarrel over an issue of voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) in the family?

Then I agreed confidently that yes I can remember that!! Then he continued that this week the government has set aside to be the week which people should go for voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) but this has happened to cause some problems in some of the people who do not really understand what voluntary counselling and testing is all about in this case my in-law.

He paused for a while however I did not want to disturb him and he continued. After hearing about voluntary counselling and testing whether on the radio or from his friends I do not know, my in-law had a very good idea of taking part in this exercise a very recommendable idea so as he has to know about their blood status in as far as HIV/AIDS is concerned together with his wife.

Without any hesitation he took the idea to his wife an idea which his wife welcomed it. Now what spoiled this whole good idea was that instead of him (my in-law) telling his wife who happens to be my sister that they should both go for Voluntary Counselling and testing so that they should both know their blood status in as far as

HIV/AIDS is concerned, he told his wife (my sister) that she alone should go for voluntary counselling and testing so that whatever results comes there he will also regard himself according to the results a thing which sounded to my sister that her husband was not serious about the issue since according to my sister's knowledge she knew that voluntary counselling and testing is not all about that and she did not even guess what her husband was trying to mean by asking her that she should alone go for voluntary counselling and testing and whatever the results comes, he will regard himself so.

However she did not at first reacted so rude but to reason with him about what voluntary counselling and testing is all about. At this point in time something ran even in my head that how come a woman can reason enough than her husband and I thought that maybe their education level is also different and decided to cut his short before he continued and ask him if at all he knows the education level of the two that is his sister and his in-law?

Exactly he agreed that he exactly how their education level that his sister attempted secondary level she left school in form 1 since she was impregnated by the same man she is staying with due to the reason that the man by that time was running an hawker and that he had a lot of money to fool her while the man himself left school only in standard four so many years ago.

You can imagine that from that I knew the answer then I allowed the man to continue. As I said earlier on, the woman tried to reason with the man in the first time about voluntary counselling and testing that there is no way she can done go for voluntary counselling and testing but if they want to know about their blood status they should both go for voluntary counselling and testing since each and every person has got his or her blood and the status may differ though they are living together as a couple.

Now hearing such kind of words, the man thought in his mind that his wife is underrating him why is she trying not to follow what she has been told by her husband him being head of the house and the husband continued shouting at his wife that he married her so that she should obey anything demanded by him and to do any errands he wanted at any time and he was sending his wife for voluntary counselling and testing as part of errands he wants his wife to do, and since she said to him that she can not go there alone, the man took into consideration that the wife is trying to be rude and threatening to divorce her if she continues to resist not to go alone for voluntary counselling and testing so that he should hear the results from her after she is being tested.

However his wife was not shaken up with these words of him and she continued challenging saying to him that if she is being sent for voluntary counselling and testing to represent a couple, then she will not go but if she goes there, she will go on her own reasons to know her blood status and confirmed to the husband that even if she goes for voluntary counselling and testing she wont even reveal the results to her husband unless they go together to the VCT and hear the results of both of them at the same time.

Now hearing such kind of words coming from the wife's mouth the man felt as if the wife is not taking him as a head of the house no more since he felt the wife so challenging and he reached to the extent of giving her a slap but the wife did not acted she just left home and reported the issue to us which we did not acted at the same time we just sent her back and promised her to come right there at their house the next day.

However, my sister confirmed to me that if her husband continued such kind of behaviour she was going to accept the divorce since she knows what she was talking about that they should both go for voluntary counselling and testing to know their blood status not him forcing her for VCT as part of errands for him to know his blood status out of her results.

However, comforted my sister and promised her to go back in peace not to provoke with him again on VCT issues until next day which I promised to come to their house and the next day (meaning today) I set off to their house together with my wife and a brother to my in-law.

After arriving home we noticed that things were indeed not in good mood since there was a great difference with the rest of the days which we used to go there in as far as the welcome was concerned all we could notice were gloomy faces of both of them.

However we did not act as if we have noted that provided we knew what were there and nothing else. As usual they gave us a place to sit and we greeted each other.

We sat there for a while without telling anything concerning the issue which we were there for since we were waiting for the owner of the house to settle down since after we arrived and greeted us they took each other into the house to have their discussion before we start talking everything concerning their issue and on the look of the things it seemed to me the wife did just come to report the issue to us without the knowledge of her husband and that maybe the husband was wondering why we were at their house as morning as it was.

However kept waiting for them to come out so that we should start the discussions we were there for. After sometime we saw the wife coming out with a covered pot in her hands with three cups on top of the pot.

Then he offered and realised that it was a local brewed non alcoholic drink called 'Thobwa'.

We all had the thobwa and finished it all, after we finished drinking it was now time to start talking the issue and in no time I started rolling the ball by introducing the whole issue to everybody there that in the previous day we saw the wife coming to my house that the husband has slapped her due to the fact that she refused to go for voluntary counselling and testing VCT on behalf of the husband as resisted that if the husband wants they should go together not the wife alone and be hearing that the husband took the wife to be rude by refusing what the head of the house has ordered and again threatened to divorce her was that so?

Yes indeed the husband answered and agreed that indeed I slapped her since she can not refuse what I have asked her to do in this case I asked her to go for VCT since this is the week of VCT so that we should know our blood status in as far as HIV/AIDS is concerned but instead saying that she can not go there alone but both of us yet I am a head of the house who needs to be respected in all aspects and continued saying that if I was not to go then her again will not hence these made me angry and I slapped her.

There was silence for the moment I guess everybody who was there thinking what the husband was saying and again feeling sorry that as elderly as he was in his mid thirties thinking like that not even knowing what voluntary counselling and testing is all about. Fine, upon hearing the husband's side we all knew that there was nothing serious in the family that might lead to divorce between the two but only ignorance of the husband about voluntary, counselling and testing hence we thought the only remedy to re-unite them was to explain to the husband what VCT was all about and that he should realise that what his wife was saying was totally true that she could not go for VCT on behalf of him and not that the wife was trying to be rude by refusing but that was the right thing.

However I did not want to explain to the husband about what VCT is all about hence I crossed the floor to the husband's brother if at all he could explain well to his younger brother all about VCT?

Willingly his elder brother explained loud and clear all about VCT and his younger brother seemed to understand what VCT was all about in shyness [shame] since his face was faced down after recognised that the wife was totally correct but instead of the wife's truth and wise she was slapped.

Now what made me happy indeed and what made me to agree that the husband had understood everything he agreed that maybe he was doing that under ignorance since he did not go far much with his education, a thing which made everybody there to laugh for it was like a joke and again he said sorry to his wife in presence of everybody there and also told everybody there that the next day they will arrange to go for voluntary counselling and testing (VCT).

Indeed it was a very interesting issue to me that even up to this day some other people could not even really or exactly know what VCT is all about despite several messages on the radios, at the hospitals and even some non-governmental organisations.

However I appreciated this husband that he did understand that he was totally wrong and now that from that day knew what voluntary counselling and testing was all about!!

The time he was finishing explaining this to me we were already at the orchard and I was listening while he was cutting the raw bananas until it was enough according to the money we agreed since I wanted raw bananas amounting to K250 and in appreciation, he also gave me some oranges and Lemons for free a thing which I appreciated.

In no time we set off for his home. This time we found his wife already home and the food was already set for us. Since it was already late in the afternoon we ate our food and bid farewell both to him and his wife however he insisted to escort me to a certain point hating which I did not deny after about a hundred and fifty metre from his house he returned to rest and I continued my journey home carrying my bananas and some citrus fruits in a sack on my head and in not much time I was home continuing the rest of my assigned work for that day!!

THE END

SATURDAY (25 / 08 / 07)

We all normally knows that chiefs are there to look after their people and on the other hand to make sure that their people are behaving in the right manner following their examples as role models, this is what each and every person can expect from each and every leader in as far as leadership responsibility is concerned.

But this turns out to be untrue due to some other leaders this time I am talking of these our own local leaders called chiefs who instead of showing up as a the good example, of their responsibility, they do things that even the people they are looking after can not regard him as a chief or their local leader.

I am saying this due to a certain incident which captured in the part week of a certain local chief who forced sex with a fourteen year old girl taking advantage of her [because she was] mentally disturbed.

It was on Friday morning and on this day it was rather chilly since it was cloudy as if it was rainy seasons hence I went to a neighbouring house where does stay a certain friend of mine Mr. Mavuto to greet him and ask him how has been his night.

I found him already waken up and as I said that it was rather a chilly day, I found him outside sitting on the veranda of his house basing the sun [basking in the sun] though it was on and off due to the cloudy.

I joined him and sit on the other side next to him, as usual, I greeted him and he greeted me back. While we were there came a certain man who wanted to discuss with the friend of mine in as far as their work was concerned since they work together as agricultural advisors in our area and this man who came his name is Mr. Rangson.

I gave them a chance to discuss their business by trying to leave the place but however Mr. Mavuto and Mr. Rangson asked me why I was leaving the place as far as Mr. Rangson arrives at the place?

I did not hesitate but to reveal that I wanted to give them chance to discuss their business in my absence then they all told me to come back and join them since there was nothing confidential about what they wanted to discuss and I went back to the place where I sat before.

They started discussing their issues while I was just did paying no attention at all to what they were talking though I was at the place since I knew it was office issues.

However I only had a capture the main thing which they were discussing that they were expected to meet at their office in Vingula at 1400 hours, that is all I captured though they talked for almost over ten minutes.

After they finished discussing Mr. Rangson did not want to leave at the same time but to stay a little bit where he found us and he took his seat.

Just when he sat down, the first thing he started talking for all of us was that some chiefs are just by name but in real sense they are just so destructive contrary to their responsibility.

Now Mr. Mavuto asked him what had happened and to which chief he was trying to talk? Then Mr. Rangson replied that just wait and listen to me [we] are very mobile due to our work which needs to meet people in various places hence in the part two weeks I was in the village called Tchinga where I had to do some work there.

While there and after completing all what I was there for I stayed somewhere with some farmers waiting for my time to be coming back home and there broke news that a certain chief in their neighbouring village had forced sex with a fourteen year old girl taking [who is] mentally disturbed.

I was really shocked since it was my first time to hear the news and that I could not expect the chief himself to do such nasty things hence I asked more clarification on that since I knew that those people might know better about the issue and I asked what had happened and the man started explaining that on the day this happened her mother received a message that one of their relatives in Mangochi is critically ill and there was a need for the girls parents to go there and see that patient being where they originally from and most of their relatives are there they left for Mangochi after bidding farewell to the chief as the head of the village that if the chief see them missing in the village he should know where they had gone and this happened.

Not knowing that the chief had already long time plans for the girl due to her appearance (plump) as the effect of the tablets which they receive to reduce the occurrence of epilepsy the chief took this as an advantage since he knows due to the girls sickness she is always alone home while her friends have either gone to work in their gardens or may be have gone to fetch water or firewood hence he took this as an advantage and he was always watching the movements of the girl just from the day her parents left for Mangochi.

Indeed one day due to the chief's effort and dedication, he met the girl walking in a certain path in the village but away from the houses and hence the chief knew for sure that if he misses that chance then he has missed it for good.

He greeted the girl and take her by her hand asking her to follow him where he was going due to her mentally disturbed head the girl could not do otherwise but to follow suit.

After the chief saw that he could not be seen by anyone else he undressed the girl and lie her down and forced her sex but due to pain the girl was crying and unfortunately the time the chief was doing that a certain woman who was fetching firewood could hear the cry and was looking where the cry was from very carefully.

Luckily the woman saw somewhere down from where she was that there were people. After a close look, she noted that he was the chief of the village and a mentally disturbed girl of the village and she was shocked and forced to run to the village to get the girl's relatives.

However the chief did not realise that he has been noted by the woman and he finished his needs he left for leaving the girl also alone going home. In no time one of the girls relative run to the place of the scene together with the woman who saw them, unfortunately they met the girl alone coming back home and after she was asked where she was coming? The girl did not hide but to reveal that the chief took her by the hand and lie me down over there and have sex.

They all felt sorry for her and did not know what step to take since the parents were away in Mangochi and again being the chief of the village and they were tongue tied hence they decided to keep silence on the matter until the girls parents come back from Mangochi however people knew the matter but they could not take any action without the girls parents but to wait until her parents comes.

After almost two days after the scene, the girls parents arrived and upon their arrival the matter was reported to them and they too were tongue tied knowing that who had done that was the chief of the village himself and they had to sit down and think the way forward however the father of the girl was afraid to take the scene to the higher levels,

Since he was afraid that if he does so the chief might chase them out of the village since they came from Mangochi to seek refugee in the village but the mother to the girls was not settled in her mind for just leaving the scene without any action but since the father of the girl was afraid of being chased, she was also quite.

Now people in the village started wondering that the days were going without seeing any action from the girls family to the chief of the village for what the chief did to the daughter and then they started visiting the family that they should not be afraid due to the reason that what he did the scene was the chief but to take action despite his responsibility as a chief and promised the family that even the people in the village will testimony the scene and that they will not be chased out of the village.

After hearing such encouragement by other villagers the girls parents decided to report the matter to the head teacher of the certain school called Nyamnyirenda where their girl used to go together with others from other areas, to receive treatment due to their diseases and the ones who offer those medicine to these kind of people a certain organisation called SURIDER and the time they planned to go to the school to report the matter the people from the organisation (SURIDER) went also there and they took advantage that even those who provide medicine to their girl heard on their own about what the chief of the village had done to their client, but they could not take action on the day since they said they need to investigate the matter after they

go and come back to the village and again they said since they cannot handle such kind of issue they need to report the scene to the police and again to report to some other organisations who defends the rights of people of such problem however they promised the parents of the girl action will be taken as soon as possible.

Since such kind of behaviour is totally condemned and more over being a chief who is supposed to show good examples to the rest of the villagers doing such kind of behaviour and they advised the girls parents not to take action on their own from that day until they hear from them after they go and come back with the feedback.

After they reported the scene and advised what to do the girls parents went back home together with their daughter while feeling very sorry for what the chief had done.

And from the day the chief did that to the girl the girl was running away once she saw the chief a thing which showed that he did the bad thing to the girl.

However the chief himself is not knowing the proved of the scene since the time he did the thing nothing else had happened to him and he is staying happily thinking that people are afraid of him being a chief.

Very bad indeed!!! That was how the scene was and more in the next journal.