



## Takalani Sesame Educates Children About AIDS

South Africans who were deprived access to basic education and healthcare under apartheid are now among those hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic. History has created enormous and unique challenges for health education, which must formulate creative messages that can communicate clear, relevant information — especially for children.

With support from USAID, in late 2002 Takalani Sesame (South Africa's Sesame Street) took a bold step in this direction and created the first HIV-positive Muppet, Kami. In addition to reading and writing lessons, Takalani Sesame now features episodes that explore HIV and AIDS and how children can deal constructively with AIDS.

"Helping South Africa cope positively with AIDS is one of USAID's top priorities," said Denise Rollins, the deputy director of USAID in South Africa. "Kami is a fun-loving five-year-old HIV-positive character that every child can relate to on television and radio. Kami is a splendid way of helping educate this important young audience about a key issue they will likely deal with during their lifetime."



Photo: USAID/Reverie Zurba

Kami, an HIV-positive Muppet on Takalani Sesame, teaches South Africans of all ages.

At the 2003 World Media Festival, Takalani Sesame earned the Gold Prize for Outstanding Children's Programming, as well as the Special Jury Prize for Overall Children's Programming. These awards — plus the thunderous applause that greeted their announcement — are an acknowledgment of the importance and effectiveness of Takalani Sesame's message.

South African Minister of Education Kader Asmal said that the awards finally recognized his country's leadership role in stemming the spread of HIV and AIDS and in fostering respect for those who are different. "These values are best learned at an early age," he said.

*USAID was instrumental in bringing Sesame Street to South Africa in the 1990s and supported the development of an HIV-positive Muppet to help children learn about HIV/AIDS.*

USAID was instrumental in bringing the internationally famous Sesame Street educational children's series to South Africa in the late 1990s at the request of the Department of Education.

Working with the South African Broadcasting Corporation and Sesame Workshop, USAID helped develop and produce the show. It has also trained local producers to adapt the show for radio to reach millions of underprivileged South African children who do not have access to television.

The program has been so successful that Sanlam, one of South Africa's largest financial institutions, has committed \$8 million to back the program for the next five years, ensuring that Kami and the rest of the cast will continue contributing to the education of South Africans of all ages.

