



ESSAY COMPETITION: How Femina HIP changed my life.

First winner prize: Christine Peter Bisangwa, Dar es Salaam.

It was in 2000 when I first learned about Fema Magazine. I was in form one and the magazine was called Femina back then. I could not afford to buy it, but I managed to read it in the school library or borrow it from other students. That's how it became part of my lifestyle at Kibasila Secondary School until I finished form four. When I reached form five, I could not get the magazine because my new school had no library. When the Fema magazines were brought to the school, there was no special place to read them. It was by chance that you could find a teacher with a copy that you could borrow. I used my holidays to look for the magazines which I had missed.

Fema Magazine has greatly changed my life in the following ways:

Socially, the magazine has helped a great deal when it comes to starting love relations, which I only started well after I was 18 years old. It helped me to safely pass the 'foolish age'. "Dear Auntie's" responses to reader's questions were useful and they assisted me to grow up safely. Fema articles have shaped me and my relations with fellow members of my community are good. They have given me courage to talk to different people about relationships and HIV. Through the pages of "Dear Uncle" I learnt about many things including witchcraft and love, being a Cassanova, and "Samaki pande mbili" (a Swahili expression literally meaning "a fish has two sides", referring to vaginal and anal sex). In the Femina January-March 2006 issue, Uncle Charles spoke about something that I had only heard about; he enlightened me when he saw a doctor who explained to him the dangers of "kumgeuza samaki" (Swahili for "turning around the fish", ie. having anal sex)! This has made me careful and enabled me to discuss with fellow youths on the dangers of "kumgauza samaki".

The magazine has helped me build *self confidence*. Now I can stand up and express myself without fear. Previously I could not tell a doctor that I had an itch in my private parts, fearing that he/she might think I had sex. I was buying medicine and treating myself. But through Fema I got the courage to speak about everything without fearing anything. When I had my period and needed pads I could not simply buy them at any shop. If I went to a shop and found a male shop assistant, I would leave and look for a shop with a female assistant and even then - if other people were around - I could not express my needs. I had no confidence. Through reading Fema Magazine I now go to buy not only pads but even condoms without fearing anything.

Reading Fema Magazine has helped me understand the culture and attitudes of other communities and helped me understand many things happening in the country. In the January-March 2006 issue I read about a prominent "somo" (a Swahili term referring to a traditional sexuality trainer) in charge of cultural and traditional rites for girls in Zanzibar. Before, I did not know what a "somo" was but I learned that a "somo" is a woman who has been chosen to clean and teach girls when they reach puberty. The article also educated me about the dangers of pregnancies and early marriage.

When it comes to education, my ability to concentrate on my studies was largely influenced by Fema Magazine. Generally, I can say that 25 percent of my success in passing exams from secondary school to university is due to Fema Magazine encouraging youth to focus on their education. The "Dear Auntie" columns inspired me to double my efforts to study more because she always advised young people in the sensitive age to avoid bad things and instead concentrate on their studies.

I didn't have a habit of reading except from what I was taught in class but an article on the culture of reading inspired me to read more both as entertainment and in order to widen my horizon. I also began buying books and newspapers which would give me more knowledge.

I also developed a passion for arts due to Fema. How? The magazine provides entertainment while it also educates the society. I discovered that I love arts so much that I chose to pursue an arts degree. There are many people who are surprised and sometime laugh at me when I tell them that I study arts. Personally I know deep down in my heart what I am looking for and that what other people study or work with would not suit me. Thus Fema Magazine continues to give me the courage to love arts because it is entertaining.

Psychologically, the magazine has changed some of my attitudes towards life. I had imagined that finishing university would secure me a job. However, through the magazine I realized that you can be jobless even after graduating. For example I read the story of Benjamin Mwanambuu who graduated from University of Dar es Salaam in 2005 but to date hasn't found permanent employment. The magazine has prepared me for any eventuality after graduating from the University.

I believe life can change. From where I am now things could go down or improve for the better. For example I read about Emmanuel Mgaya (with the artist name Masanja) started out selling second-hand clothes but rose to fame as a top actor. His life has changed dramatically.

Sex and relations is one of the main issues that I learnt about in Fema Magazine. The continuous awareness boosts my knowledge and enables me to talk freely about sex and relations.

Fema Magazine tells the truth about HIV/AIDS. It has changed my life and made me understand many things about HIV/AIDS. After reading about the truth of condoms I fully understand the ABC's on safe sex and how to protect myself against HIV. This has

given me courage and now I can carry condoms wherever I am, as protection against sexual transmitted diseases and HIV unlike other girls who think that girls having condoms reflects prostitution or that it is the duty of men to carry condoms. If you depend on the man to have condoms you may find yourself having unsafe sex because he did not have them at that particular time.

I am so proud of Femina HIP who publishes Fema Magazine. Femina HIP is leading in spreading education on healthy lifestyles to people of all ages.