



AFRICA UNITED (Cert 12)

Directed by: Debs' Gardner-Paterson

Running time: 104 minutes

SUMMARY

Africa United is a heart-warming film about friendship and unity in pursuit of a shared goal. Set in some of the most AIDS-ravaged countries on Earth, it is also a gentle reminder of the seriousness of the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic outside the Western World.

Fabrice is a young teenager with a prodigious talent for playing football and dreams of one day playing professionally. Though from a wealthy background he is best friends with penniless AIDS orphan, Dudu, who has taken upon himself the role of Fabrice's football 'manager'. In the run-up to the 2010 World Cup, Fabrice is spotted by a talent scout who urges him to take part in football trials in the Rwandan capital, Kigali. The trials are for an African youth team (called 'Africa United') which will take part in the opening ceremony of the World Cup in South Africa.

Fabrice and Dudu (along with Dudu's sister, Beatrice) board what they think is the bus to Kigali. However, they accidentally board a bus going across the border into the Democratic Republic of Congo. By the time they realise their mistake it's too late to make the trials. Undaunted, they decide to travel the three thousand miles to South Africa where they trust that Fabrice will be allowed to join the team. In the course of their travels they are joined by a former child soldier and a sex slave, the unlikely band bonding closer the further they go.

PART 1: WHAT YOU FELT ABOUT THE FILM

Sometimes young people find it hard to contribute to a group discussion. They may feel shy or that their

contribution might appear silly. The first part of the session is therefore a chance for young people to think about the film and begin to develop a reaction to what they have seen in a way that everyone will have something to contribute. This is a simple, quick exercise to get everyone thinking about their reaction to the film.

The film opens with Dudu explaining how to make a football out of a condom, plastic bags and string. Explain to the young people that they have five minutes, in teams of two, to do something similar, only you might want to substitute balloons for condoms! Explain that there will be a prize for the team with the best ball. There will also be a prize for the team which does the best job of explaining what they liked best about the film and why.

After five minutes, give each team the chance to kick their makeshift balls over a certain distance. The team which gets their ball the furthest wins. After each kick, the team must explain why they liked the part of the film they liked best. Award chocolates/sweets to the winners (You may want to select more than one winner for the explanation).

PART 2: KEY THEMES IN THE FILM

Africa United gives a refreshing glimpse into the lives and struggles of young people growing up in sub-Saharan Africa; an insight which we don't often get in Western films. The film challenges us to re-examine our own goals, values and faith in light of another culture's take on these issues; which is what the following section gives the young people the opportunity to do.

1. When I grow up I want to be...

Ask the young people to think about what their dream job would be but tell them to keep it to themselves for

now. When they've had a minute to think, ask them to take turns miming their choice and seeing if anyone else can guess what the job is. As each job is revealed, ask the young people why they chose that particular profession.

Clip – Chapter 2: 6 mins, 18 secs – 7 mins, 35 secs.

In the scene we see Fabrice arguing over his future career with his mother. His mother wants him to be a doctor in America, like his brother, but he wants to be a footballer. By contrast, Dudu's sister, Beatrice, has her heart set on becoming a doctor.

- Ask the young people why they think Fabrice wants to play football. Is there anything wrong with wanting to do something which we enjoy and which we're good at? Since he clearly has a talent for playing football, why do they think his mother wants him to be a doctor?

Ultimately, we can't know why Fabrice's mother is so keen for him to be a doctor. It's worth pointing out that it's hard when parents have spent a lot of money on their children's education (and Fabrice's would have cost a lot by Rwandan standards) to see their children choose careers for which that education isn't necessary. However, it's also true that, in many cultures it's a real status symbol to be able to say that your children are doctors or lawyers (whether or not your children are any good at that profession).

- By contrast, why do they think Beatrice is keen to become a doctor?

Beatrice lost both her parents to AIDS and her brother is also suffering with the disease. She's very aware of the need for doctors in Africa. She also has a genuinely caring heart, even wanting to care for one of the soldiers who's been chasing them after Fabrice shoots him in the leg. There's no doubt that her career

ambitions are motivated by the desire to serve others.

Key question: What drives our dreams; what's the motivation behind them?

Relevant Bible verses:

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

- Colossians 3.23
- Psalm 127.1
- Philippians 2.4
- Ephesians 2.10
- Ecclesiastes 9.10a

2. 'Sex kills more people than guns'

As a group or in two teams, conduct a test with the young people to see how much they know about HIV/AIDS (There are many such quizzes online: www.aids.about.com/library/bl_hiv_quiz.htm and www.avert.org/hiv-aids-quiz.php are just two examples. You could print out the quiz beforehand or simply do the quiz 'live' online with the young people). Give prizes to the winners.

While it's really important to be aware of HIV/AIDS and be wise, the fact is that (with the exception of an unfortunate minority) it doesn't have a huge impact on most peoples' lives in the UK. This isn't the case in Africa, as the film makes clear from the very opening scene:

Clip – Chapter 1: 0 mins, 30 secs – 1 min, 56 secs

In the clip we see Dudu educating us about the importance of safe sex, casually making the comment

that, if his parents had followed his advice, they would still be alive. Later we learn that Dudu himself has HIV (presumably caught in the womb). He clearly knows his facts on HIV. How much do the young people know about the impact of HIV in Africa?

Explain the following facts to the young people (all taken from www.unaids.org, where more information on the subject can be found):

- An estimated 22.5 million people living with HIV live in sub-Saharan Africa (2009). That's 68% of the global number of people with HIV.
- About 34% of all people living with HIV lived in the 10 countries of southern Africa in 2009 (Several of which Dudu and his friends travel through, including South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe).
- With an estimated 5.6 million HIV-positive people, South Africa (host of the 2010 World Cup) continues to have the world's largest HIV epidemic.
- Swaziland (which borders South Africa) has the highest adult HIV prevalence in the world: an estimated 25.9% of people (in other words, 1 in every 4 people) in the country were living with HIV in 2009.

Ask the young people why they think this is such a big problem in Africa compared to the UK (Reasons include lack of medical care, poor education, inability of people to afford life saving ARV drugs, etc).

Explain that when people became aware of AIDS in Western countries in the early eighties it was the gay community who were the most affected. Because of this AIDS was for a short time known as the 'gay' disease; if you were an HIV victim, people would assume you were homosexual.

- While African countries are working hard to educate people about HIV, what sorts of rumours and assumptions might be made about HIV and the people infected with it?

(Myths that have spread about AIDS have included: people believing that you can catch AIDS by touching someone who has HIV or touching something someone with HIV has touched; that you must be living a sexually promiscuous lifestyle; that you can be cured if you have unprotected sex, etc).

Key question: However people have contracted HIV, how should we respond to those suffering with the virus?

Relevant Bible verses:

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

- Mark 1.40–42
- Matthew 7.1
- Luke 8.42–48
- John 8.2–11

3. Is your team your family?

Clip – Chapter 13: 1 hour, 1 min, 8 seconds – 1 hour, 3 mins, 30 secs.

In the clip we see Dudu reminding the others that they are team, that they are family and that the team comes before any individuals. In his own case, Dudu risks his own life (giving up the chance of essential ARV drugs) in order to see the team's goal-getting Fabrice to the World Cup fulfilled.

Ask the young people which teams they each support (if some of the group aren't into sport, ask who their favourite band is instead). Explain that you want to test the loyalties of the group: how far would they each go to support their team/band?

- Would they watch them on TV?
- Would they buy a shirt supporting their team/band? Would they buy a new shirt every time their team changed their strip?
- Would they go to watch their team/band live? Would they buy a season ticket/follow the band to each gig on a tour?
- Would they buy shares in their team/band's record company?
- Would they be prepared to die for their team/band (Imagine rival supporters threatened to kill them unless they gave up supporting their team/band)?

If anyone is willing to go so far as to die for their chosen team/band reward them with a chocolate/sweet; such loyalty deserves it!

- Ask the young people how they feel about people who are willing to risk their own lives for others (e.g. armed forces, emergency services, etc). Why do we feel that way?

Key question: Who would we be willing to make a life changing/threatening sacrifice for?

Relevant Bible verses:

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

- Romans 5.6–8
- Ephesians 4.2–3
- Mark 10.42–45

- Romans 13.8

4. Answers to prayer

Give each young person a piece of paper and something to write with. Individually, ask the young people to write down those things which they need but don't have. Once they've done this, encourage them, if they are comfortable doing so, to share. Whoever has the most needs gets a chocolate/sweet as their need is clearly greatest (Though, obviously, don't let them know beforehand).

Clip – Chapter 2: 5 mins, 11 secs – 6 mins, 18 secs

Beatrice's list of things which they need includes food, football, money for school and books (She might also have included parents). Did anyone have any of those things on their list of things they needed?

- This isn't the only occasion on which Beatrice prays in the film. Are her prayers answered? How?
- Ask if anyone has ever prayed about the things which they need. If so, did they get an answer?

Often God uses other people as the answer to our prayers. And sometimes he uses us to answer other people's prayers.

Key question: How can we be the answer to the prayers of others? Can we be the answer to the prayers of people like Beatrice?

Relevant Bible verses:

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

- James 2.14–17
- Matthew 25.34–40

- Hebrews 13.1–3
- Acts 9.1–19

5. Escaping ourselves

Clip – Chapter 8: 35 mins, 45 secs – 40 mins, 40 secs.

For much of the film we see Foreman George and the other children trying to outrun the chasing soldiers. While George eventually gets free of them, it's harder to escape the memories of what he's done; he can still hear all the voices in his head from the day when the group he was in attacked a village. We don't know the whole story but many militia groups in Africa (such as the brutal Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda) use child soldiers to carry out murder, rape and mutilation of innocent people to spread terror; it's safe to assume that this is the sort of thing George was involved in in his past.

- How does Foreman George show that he wants nothing to do with his old way of life?

We may not have been involved with murder but all of us have said and done things which we know are wrong and which we wish we could undo. The Good News of Jesus is that, because of his dying for us on the cross, the price is paid for all the wrong things we have ever done. If we accept that sacrifice, then we are forgiven, completely and utterly.

Foreman George has already turned his back on his life of violence by running away. However, his throwing the gun into the lake is a symbol of how he rejects his past self.

If we turn away from the wrong things we do and accept Jesus' forgiveness then we are forgiven. Those who have decided to do that may get baptised or

confirmed as a public symbol of that reality. But sometimes it can be useful to have a reminder of the fact that our wrongs are put to an end in Jesus.

- Give each person a piece of paper and something to write with. Explain that there's no obligation to take part but if there's something that anyone wants to say sorry to God for, then to write it down on their piece of paper. Make clear that no one else – including yourself – will ever see what's on that piece of paper; this is between them and God.
- When everyone who wants to (including yourself) has had time to write, explain that Jesus has already died for the things which they've written. In his eyes, the things they've done are gone. As a symbol of this, they're now going to destroy their bits of paper.
- If you're in a room with a fireplace or outside with access to a barbecue/brazier you might want to set fire to the pieces of paper (taking all necessary safety precautions). Alternatively, a paper shredder makes a good 21st Century alternative.
- While the young people take it in turns to destroy their papers, you may want to encourage people to stay quiet while you read aloud some of the verses below.

Key question: How do we escape ourselves?

Relevant Bible verses:

You could look at the following scriptures if you want to encourage the young people to see what the Bible says about this...

- Romans 8.1–2, 38–39
- Psalm 103.8–12
- 1 John 1.8–9
- Galatians 5.1

PART 3: COMPARING THE STORY

The third part of the session is a chance to compare the story of the film with a story in the Bible. What are the similarities and differences, and what does this tell us about God's Kingdom?

Young people may not grasp all the theological points that could be made, but it's important for them to begin to get used to the idea of critiquing what they see and holding it against the values and beliefs of the Christian faith.

Some of this reflection may come from an open discussion and as seen above, there are many themes and directions that this could take.

While the immediate comparison may not seem obvious, the character and aims of Dudu bear some striking resemblance to those of John the Baptist. In both cases, their driving force is not to promote themselves but another.

Read Mark's account of John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-8). You may also wish to look at the fuller accounts in Matthew 3.1–17 and Luke 3.1–20) with the young people. Point out that John ended up being imprisoned and killed for what he was doing (You can read this with the young people in Mark 6.17–29 or summarise the key facts).

Explain that you want to look at the similarities between John the Baptist and Dudu. Explore the following questions:

- Who is richer, John the Baptist or Dudu? Who's the better dressed? Who has the better diet? Could either of them be described as wealthy?
- Both John and Dudu have a message or goal to achieve. Is that message about themselves or someone else? Who is it about?
- What is the relationship between them and the

people they are trying to promote? Whose relationship is closer? Did John always agree with Jesus or Dudu with Fabrice? Was that a problem?

- Would you describe either of them as having much going for them in terms of influence or power?
- Despite their backgrounds, both John and Dudu end up getting the attention of those with power and influence. How do they do that? What is the result?
- Both John and Dudu risk a lot personally in their life missions. What do they risk? What price do they pay? Why do you think they were willing to pay such a high price?
- Would you be willing to do what either of them did? Why or why not?

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