delay sexual activity, practising safer sex (including consistent and correct condom use), and having a reduced number of sexual partners.

Providing HIV information and training in social skills helps empower young people to protect themselves. Research confirms that higher educational levels are associated with higher rates of condom use. Young people have the right to information and to education that is affordable, of good quality, promotes gender equality and is to their advantage.

Young people also need access to gender-sensitive, youth-friendly health services and supplies for sexually transmitted infections/HIV/AIDS prevention and care, including condoms and voluntary and confidential counselling and testing. In many cultures, however, societal norms are not receptive to the needs of young people in accessing reproductive health services.

Crucial to the whole process is challenging unequal gender norms and promoting positive gender relations. This requires a political will to create an enabling environment that includes building resilience among young women and girls, young men and boys; ensuring an effective social support system in the family, school and community; and enhancing protective factors such as feeling valued in society, being exposed to positive role models, and expecting a sense of hope in the future.

What role can communicators play?

Communicators are vital in the world’s fight against HIV/AIDS. Journalists and broadcasters are already doing impressive work, but much more needs to be done. Communication professionals have the right and the responsibility to use their media as a vehicle for information dissemination. Information is crucial, but so too are the ways in which it is presented on and which voices are granted credibility.

For HIV/AIDS, where stigma, gender and other forms of inequality play such key roles, the media ideally need to provide a forum where a plurality of voices is heard, and discrimination based on prejudice or socio-economic status is set aside.

Communicators can highlight the fact that this is not just a disease of the faces of the heart of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; give prominent voice to the many who are affected by the epidemic; provide breadth and depth to the broadcasting time to HIV/AIDS public service messages; support the development of AIDS storylines in existing programming; make public service messages and original programming available to other outlets on a rights-free basis; and generally amplify the voices of people living with HIV/AIDS.

This task requires vision, dedication and resources, and we must find programming that truly engages audiences. Journalists and broadcasters can talk to listeners and viewers about HIV in a language they understand and find compelling. They can build partnerships and alliances. They can put pressure on the powerful to take the issue seriously and give the people the information they need to protect themselves and those they love.

Above all, they can do more than the perpetrators of gender justice, avoiding discrimination and stigmatisation and challenging and rehabilitating their prejudices. For gender activists, the questions are the same as they have always been:

‘Those questions revolve around the most basic issues of power and control, definitions and values, access and exclusion... Even though global political and communication environments have changed dramatically, patterns of gender inequality still await transformation.’

Notes


2. Ibid, p. 51.


Acknowledgement

The above is a partial draw on two UNAIDS publications: HIV and AIDS Fact Sheet Overview (UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on Gender and HIV/AIDS), and the Operational Guide on Gender and HIV/AIDS. Both are available from WACC.

REFERENCES


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The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) promotes communication for social change. It believes that the media have a special role in a human rights agenda that defines people’s common humanity, strengthens cultures, enables participation, creates community, and challenges tyranny and oppression.

WACC’s key concerns are media diversity, equal and affordable access to communication and knowledge, gender and media justice, and the relationship between communication and power. It tackles these through advocacy, education, research, publishing, and sharing of knowledge. WACC’s worldwide membership works with faith-based and secular partners at grassroots, regional, and global levels, giving preference to the most dispossessed. Being WACC means ‘taking sides’.

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Gender inequality is a key factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Poverty’s profound links to power, asset, property and wealth relations lie at the heart of a pandemic that disproportionately affects young women. Therefore, tackling gender inequality is central to tackling the pandemic itself.

HIV/AIDS is a health and development issue, and it is inextricably linked to gender inequality and to violence against women. Often women are prevented from taking action when they feel sick, and this can lead to disease, access to sexual and reproductive health and education services, and are unable to negotiate safer sex.iena and a lack of power. Violations of women’s rights make women’s vulnerability to HIV worse.

The ABC slogan – abstain, be faithful, use a condom – is the mainstay of many HIV-prevention programmes, with the majority of women are denied those rights, their vulnerability to violence, poverty and homelessness. Poverty can also fuel HIV transmission as women are driven to marry young girls to exchange for money, housing, food or education.

To address AIDS effectively, we have to understand how women are contracting the virus and why. A comprehensive strategy to combat sexual harassment and violence against women, to ensure they have access to HIV care and prevention services, and have access to education, and to strengthen legal protection for women’s property and inheritance rights.

Tackling such inequalities is not just a matter of HIV/AIDS. All of us must be fully involved. Men need to declare zero tolerance to male violence against women. They must become committed to their daughters’ education and help alleviate the burden of caring for children, and men, and need to follow the hair and to promote and strengthen the human rights of women and girls and to confront the gender inequalities and poverty that fuel the epidemic.
COMMUNICATION FOR BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Communication is considered one of the most important activities in HIV/AIDS programming. It can play a critical role in empowering people to tackle HIV/AIDS and in overcoming HIV/AIDS-related stigma and prejudice. It is critical for effective communication that:
- information is accurate, simple and appropriately targeted;
- information takes into consideration the local context;
- by building culturally sensitive messages, information motivates people to transform their ideas, practices and behaviour in a local context.
Communication messages and materials need also to take into account the social and cultural norms in which people live and the influence those norms have on their ability to act on knowledge and information. Here, women’s lack of power and lack of access to skills and resources are important issues.
In addition, information and communication messages must be appropriately packaged and targeted to ensure the most effective outreach. This requires clarity about who the intended beneficiaries are, how best to reach them and what the information or message is supposed to achieve. For example, written material is not the best way to inform an illiterate or semi-literate audience or those who lack time to read—which generally applies to women from poor and informal settlements. A more effective way of reaching them may be through local radio or using participatory methods such as group discussions or community theatre.

Another important question relates to who conveys a message and whether that person or organisation has sufficient credibility to have an impact on the audience.
The messenger is as important as the message: local politicians, religious leaders, traditional healers and midwives are likely to be the best position to deliver appropriate and effective messages to communities. Because HIV/AIDS is such a sensitive issue, using peer educators is often considered one of the most effective strategy to reach particular audiences.
In countries with high HIV prevalence rates, it is crucial that communication not only focuses on HIV prevention, but also on living with the consequences of HIV/AIDS. Thus, people living with HIV need to have appropriate access to treatment options, nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, their rights and what to do if their rights are violated. Similarly, people directly affected by AIDS, for example widows and orphans, require information on support mechanisms and resources.

TACKLING EXCLUSION

Of course, communication for behaviour change is not merely concerned with providing information to those infected with HIV and affected by AIDS, but also with confronting and transforming the norms and stereotypes that perpetuate inequality and social exclusion, particularly on the basis of gender. Effective communication has to be grounded in and relevant to local realities, while seeking to transform those norms and practices that ignore human rights standards and values.
Crucial to this analysis is an assessment of which voices are heard and which are excluded in decision-making processes. The process through which the agenda on HIV/AIDS is set often excludes the voices of those most affected. As the Panos Institute points out:

“Communication strategies need to be redrafted so that they give prominence to the creation of communication environments which encourage inter-personal communication, dialogue and debate, and which focus as much on providing a voice to those most affected by HIV as they do on educating them through messages. The evidence increasing suggests that only when people become truly empowered to discuss and think about HIV, does real individual and social change come about.”

HOW DO WOMEN’S RIGHTS RELATE TO HIV/AIDS

Lack of respect for women’s rights increases the prevalence and worsens the impact of HIV/AIDS. For those denied or with limited access to information, education, and health care services, the risk of contracting HIV is increased and the impact of the virus felt more keenly. The ability of any individual to access their human rights (outlined in the table below) is thus closely linked with the spread of HIV/AIDS and its impact on people and communities around the world.

The spread of HIV also undermines progress in realizing women’s rights (which are basic human rights) since the pandemic strains a country’s resources, depletes its human health.

Table: Human rights affected by HIV/AIDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human rights affected by HIV/AIDS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The right to life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to the highest attainable standard of mental and physical health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to liberty and security of the person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to freedom of association.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to non-discrimination, equal protection and equality before the law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to freely receive and impart information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to equal access to education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The right to marry and found a family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The right to privacy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The right to freedom of movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to freedom of expression and opinion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The right to be free from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to seek and enjoy asylum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In many cultures, girls are perceived as less important than boys, with girls being denied access to education systems, permanently or for protracted periods. Young people need to take into account the large numbers of young people outside formal education systems, permanently or for protracted periods. In order to put their knowledge on how to protect themselves into practice, young people need the skills and confidence to use the information they receive. This includes self-esteem and negotiation skills, skills to...