

Media, Human Rights and HIV/AIDS coverage in Nigeria

Results of a media content monitoring regarding HIV/AIDS stigmatization and discrimination conducted by *Projekthope*.

Friday April 1, 2005

Scope: Monitoring of seven media organization. Three newspapers, two news magazines and two Radio Stations(Guardian, Punch, NewAge, Tell, The News, Ray Power 100.5Fm and Radio Lagos 107.5Fm).

Duration: Two months. January 10-March 18, 2005

Period of monitor: Monday-Friday for the newspapers.
Mondays for magazines.
Monday-Friday, 8AM-8PM for the Radio Stations.

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General overview: the media and HIV/AIDS Stigmatization

The Nigerian media through which the people get most of their reports and information about issues have not been traditionally top on the game regarding issues and coverage of human rights. It has not always been able to consistently offer very professional and qualitative reports in a way that helps to draw the critical connections between rights, freedom and development. Even the more serious sections of the media are sometimes given to superficial reporting devoid of context and analytic thrust that invites perspective and elevates the debates on public policy.

From early on in the HIV/AIDS challenge, the media have used a series of powerful images to depict HIV/AIDS and people living with it. HIV/AIDS has variously been portrayed as punishment for immoral behavior, as a crime in relation to innocent and guilty victims, as war in relation to a virus that must be fought, as horror in which infected people are demonized thus fuelling the now widespread belief that HIV/AIDS is shameful. At the same time, rarely are the voices of PLWHAs heard and expressed, rarely are accurate depictions of healthy individuals who actually continue to live productive lives despite their diagnosis seen, and rarely are positive images of life with treatment and support displayed. Rather, what we live with is a continuous negative depiction of HIV/AIDS and those living with it. These images represent ready-made but inaccurate explanations that provide a powerful basis for stigmatization and discrimination, which delays appropriate help seeking; terminates treatment; and interferes with voluntary testing and counseling. The social phenomenon of HIV/AIDS as demonstrated in such forms as anxiety, fear, and denial and at its very worst stigma and discrimination is highly colored from the interpretations and perceptions from media reportage and coverage of HIV/AIDS. This much is due to the reality that our people mainly rely on the media to construct their identities. However, the fact of the situation is that the media that the people so much rely on for their identities does not accurately reflect this reality. This becomes obvious from observed reportage on this issue. Result is gross abuse of the human rights of people living with HIV.

Several people have been denied employment, education and housing because of their status. Some workers have been outrightly sacked because of their positive status; many times workers are made to go through non-consensual testing. Wives have been sent packing and some have committed suicide for the fear of rejection by family, friends and the society. Several others have been denied

travel visas as a result of their HIV status. In addition, many more refuse to even determine their status, while others have preferred to die in silence.

HIV/AIDS, media and human rights

Human rights are inherent in man. They constitute a body of unique virtues, which have been highly cherished and valued from time immemorial. Every human being has certain basic fundamental rights, which must be upheld and respected by all individual as well as institutions of society.

These rights are universal and are supposed to apply without discrimination. The quest for the respect and protection of our human rights should therefore be seen as part of a broader effort to preserve the dignity of the human individual and protecting the essence of living. It is an internationally accepted principle that human rights, like law, should guide our society. Human rights are supposed to establish a legal and moral imperative that should infuse many of our social interactions and inform our strategic planning and interventions.

Human rights are rights accruing to every human being by virtue of their humanity. They are universal, indivisible, inter-dependent and inter-related. Thus, the abuse of one right eventually leads to the abuse of other rights. Several instruments provide for human rights. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) both of 1976. Others include the African Charter of Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) of 1981 ratified by Nigeria and domesticated by means of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Ratification and Enforcement Act, cap 10, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN), 1990, the International Labor Organization (ILO)'s instrument concerning discrimination in employment and occupation, termination of employment, protection of workers' privacy and safety and health at work, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1981 ratified by Nigeria in 1985, the 1999 Federal Constitution of Nigeria, etc.

Those rights as stipulated by these instruments will include:

- Right to privacy
- Right to education
- Rights to social security and services
- Rights to marriage and family life
- Right to liberty, security and freedom of movement
- Right to self-determination of affected groups

Right to treatment and care

Freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment

Right to work and right to equal protection of the law

With reference to the 1979 constitution of Nigeria, the relevant section that impacts directly to the issue in focus are section 30, which provides for the right to life and safety, section 31 guarantees the right to dignity of the human person and frowns at inhuman and degrading treatment, while section 34 provides for the right to privacy and family life (confidentiality of status).

Moreover, section 39 guarantees the right to freedom from discrimination, although this section is silent on discrimination based on health status. The International Declaration on Stigma and Discrimination, which Nigeria ratified also, elaborates further on the need for countries to put in place legal frameworks to combat this attitude. The discrimination (prohibition) and enforcement bill is still before the house committee on human rights waiting to be passed. Till date, there is no law that explicitly protects PLWHAs from discrimination based on their HIV status.

In view of the fact that the media are demonstrating the capacity to enhance economic development, contribute to a qualitative health care delivery system and give expression to hitherto unheard voices, it is, we believe, the challenge before every journalist to bring the issue of human rights to the centre stage by educating the more vigorously about the importance of these rights and reporting issues without hampering or infringing on these rights. **In essence, the struggle for human rights, within in the HIV/AIDS context should be seen as a broad effort to preserve the dignity of the human individual in the Nigerian political community.**

The challenge calls for a more elaborate understanding of the occurrence of this illness and its relationship to human rights – one that goes beyond prevention and impact minimization, but which delves into respecting and promoting the dignity and equal worth of people living with HIV/AIDS. The nasty thing about discrimination is that it increases vulnerability to infection and reinforces human rights abuse for those who are already infected. Seen from this perspective therefore, non-discrimination is not just a fundamental principle of human rights, it is the most important normative principle that can build a liveable community and sustain its survival instinct. In order words it is the basis of a cultured existence.

Projekthope wants to use this opportunity to draw attention of our friends in the media to the important advances under international law in the development of treaties and conventions through which governments can therefore be held more accountable to ensure that everyone is treated equally and have equal access to

public goods and services. The media surely owe it as a duty to push this position as part of its own campaign to promote the human rights of the marginal sections of the community.

Let me emphasize a little bit. The principle of non-discrimination is critical because of the different opportunities available to individuals to access information, to understand the risks, to reduce the risks, and to access preventive and care services. Discrimination and inequality are perhaps the twin most pernicious forces driving this epidemic. That ability to locate the nexus between infection and the creation of a socio-economic status of inequality is for the media to constantly reveal. Wherever it strikes, HIV/AIDS exacerbates existing inequalities and creates the fatal combination of stigma and neglect.

In a nutshell, we now know that vulnerability to HIV increases when people are denied the right to information; or when they are misinformed and when people are denied adequate support and services. These are the critical human rights issues in the HIV/AIDS environment of Nigeria today and this chilling reality is making the campaign a problematic challenge for care givers, donors, governments, and people living with the reality themselves.

Report of monitoring

In 2003, during a workshop organized by the Red Cross, Dr. Pat Matemilola, Coordinator, Network of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs) once pleaded "Stigma does not affect only PLWHAs, it drives the epidemic and releases negative emotions in PLWHAs let us join hands to stop stigma before it stops us" During the course of this project I had the opportunity of raising the issue with some of my friends who are HIV positive, I talked with Abigail Atirene, Jumai Naduk and also Rolake Adetoyinbo, below are some of their views as recorded.

"When you test positive, your sense of worth goes to the dogs. You feel so unworthy. You take your cue from what you hear around you. And from what the media is saying, HIV equals death"

"It is the stigma out there that kills most of us, not the virus. When you stigmatize, you are killing the person and not the virus"

"Knowledge is power, what gave me the courage to carry on is information; the realization that I didn't have to die".

"With information, I saw that my life stretched well ahead of me".

More than anything, Projekthope believes that it is important that the media see the issue of HIV/AIDS more as a human rights issue and that they have an

obligation to see to its solution rather than look at the issue from the pure sense of searching to generate news. It would be obvious from our findings that Matemilola's sermon has fallen on deaf ears. From our effort, we monitored seven media organizations, five in the print category and two in the broadcast. This effort spanned a period of ten weeks, January 10-March 18. One thing that kept reoccurring in all the media is the sheer level of misinformation and negative portrayal of HIV/AIDS out there. It is a fact that there exist a lot of inaccurate and exaggerated notions about HIV/AIDS even in an institution set out to educate. In all the media, it is common to find the adjectives described below in constant and reckless use. I have attempted to supply a dictionary definition, while deliberately leaving out the contextual connotations from how they were used in the reports (samples of reports attached).

Scourge – A cause of great suffering and affliction, especially to many people.

Pandemic – Describing a wide spread epidemic of a disease, one that affect a whole country.

Fight – Attack or engage in combat

Ravaging – To cause extensive damage to a place, to destroy it

Battle – A long or difficult struggle

War – An open state of armed conflict, open hostility, fierce

Raging – To cause extensive damage, destruction

Carrier – someone who is infected by a disease causing organism, may remain without symptoms but capable of transmitting to others.

Dreaded - Horrific

Burden – difficulty, problem

Ordeal – a difficult, painful, or testing experience

Victim – A person subjected to death, suffering, and ill treatment

Sufferers – to deteriorate because of something

Patients – a person who is being treated by or is registered with a doctor, dentist etc.

Tackle – to deal with something awkward or difficult

Treat – to take care or deal with a person, illness, injury, medically.

Havoc – great destruction or damage.

It is instructive to note that words like these, when considered in the context in which they are used contribute to and help fuel HIV related stigma and discrimination. The negative adjective in use by the media only goes to reinforce the negative perceptions already entrenched in the mind of the people who continue to see PLWHAs as hopeless people.

I shall present an attempt at analyzing the result of each of the media in focus with few of their reports for emphasis and clarifications. As background to my analysis shall be parameters like-

- **Displayed understanding of the issue in focus by the media**
- **Efforts to generate resources from PLWHA themselves**
- **Effort to do an objective analysis of issues raised in reports**
- **Commitment and depth**
- **Effort to generate materials internally**
- **Space devoted**

- Sensitivity of stories published
- Language and Captioning.
- Follow up on reports.

Below is a table that compares the space devoted to HIV/AIDS by the three Newspapers monitored. The Magazines are such a shock to even we professional monitors because for an issue of such mammoth national health attention like HIV/AIDS, the two News Magazine in focus did not report any HIV/AIDS issues for the eight weeks running! **The News** magazine attempted what looks like a report on advancement in treatment, but ended up not saying anything specific because of the poor grasp of the technical challenge of the language employed. For the average reader, the report offered no insight or clarity. It is doubtful too if it offered any value to a scientist mind either. The report is typical of such that helps fuel stigmatization and this is not helped with the typographical error in the picture caption of Farouk Mohammed, which carelessly read “**AID patient**”. Please find attached.

	Punch	Guardian	New Age
1st week			
Total page published	288	374	200
Total News published	50976sq in	80634.4sq in	35840sq in
Total news on HIV	8.16sq in	66.54sq in	247.86sq in
% devote to HIV	0.16%	0.083%	0.7%
2nd week			
Total page published	296	368	200
Total News published	52392sq in	99390.8sq in	35840sq in
Total news on HIV	52.95sq in	11.1sq in	250.62sq in
% devote to HIV	0.01%	0.01%	0.69%
3rd week			
Total page published	320	384	200
Total News published	56632sq in	88064.8sq in	35840sq in
Total news on HIV	127.50sq in	32.150sq in	193.63sq in
% devote to HIV	0.23%	0.04%	0.54%
4th week			
Total page published	288	408	200
Total News published	5097sq in	88064.8sq in	35840sq in
Total news on HIV	7sq in	319.68sq in	160.4sq in
% devote to HIV	0.014%	0.36%	0.45%

5th week			
Total page published	336	416	200
Total News published	59472sq in	89889.6sq in	35840sq in
Total news on HIV	43.75sq in	00	154.12sq in
% devote to HIV	0.074%	0%	0.43%
6th week			
Total page published	360	448	160
Total News published	63720sq in	96688.8sq in	28672sq in
Total news on HIV	35.76sq in	129.02	183.33sq in
% devote to HIV	0.056%	0.13%	0.64%
7th week			
Total page published	338	448	200
Total News published	59826sq in	96688.8sq in	35840sq in
Total news on HIV	169.04sq in	56.25sq in	25.75sq in
% devote to HIV	0.28%	0.06%	0.07%
8th week			
Total page published	314	424	200
Total News published	55578sq in	91514.4sq in	35840sq in
Total news on HIV	317.27sq in	202.96sq in	111.83sq in
% devote to HIV	0.6%	0.2%	0.3%
9th week			
Total page published	336	464	200
Total News published	59472sq in	100088.4sq in	35840sq in
Total news on HIV		25.2sq in	219.15sq in
% devote to HIV	0.03%	0.02%	0.6%
10th week			
Total page published	352	428	200
Total News published	62304sq in	92426.8sq in	35840sq in
Total news on HIV	25.91sq in	298.18sq in	184.22sq in
% devote to HIV	0.04%	0.3%	0.5%

Before I come to the two broadcasts stations monitored, Ray power FM and Eko Radio 107.5FM, let us take a trip round some of the reportage in the newspapers as a way of analysis. We monitored five days a week, excluding Saturdays and

Sundays. For the Radio stations, we monitored from 8am to 8pm also excluding the weekends.

I shall begin with the **Punch**. In all, the punch published 28 stories, during the period of our focus and in the ten weeks time span. On page 12 of the Punch on the first day of monitoring, occupying a strategic space on the left side is a story captioned "Governors wife supports HIV/AIDS carriers" Jan. 10 2005. As demonstrated from the story and as evident in other stories carried by the paper, we realize there is need for journalists to understand that there is a great difference between HIV and AIDS. Some people who are HIV positive do not even require treatment, as their immune system is still very strong. With a positive attitude to life and maintaining a balanced diet, they may not even develop AIDS, AIDS been the condition at which the immune system is at the mercy of the virus. This stage will exist if a positive person shuns the opportunity for treatment and care which reportage like this make possible because of its impact on stigmatization. Carrier as defined could be anyone who does not even know his or her status, like the journalist who wrote the story.

The story in the Punch of February 14, 2004 also on page 12 says, "Why people living with HIV/AIDS don't have positive babies" The story failed to explain in detail why this is so. While the story could have projected a positive side of this reality by showing us that people living with HIV/AIDS still have the capacity of continuing normal life like having children who may not be positive, it refused to do so. In similar vein is a report of March 3rd also in the Punch which says, "Researcher advocates HIV/AIDS test before marriage". The story went on to claim that 80% of HIV deaths in Africa are due to marriage without test. In the first place, the story is spurious, while supporting the fact that determining ones status is a great step, the idea negates the rights of individual to marry irrespective of their status and in the context at which it was written, it fuels already established notion of HIV. Some people are married and have failed to remain faithful to their partners, why do we need to isolate and recommend testing only to people who want to marry? In juxtaposing this is a story on March 2, page 10, which simply says "Go for HIV/AIDS" without bothering to highlight why a test is important. The idea here is to assume that people already know, but in reality, the idea of a test is like a death sentence to majority of Nigerians. It should be our duty to further educate the people about why a test is a solution and not the other way round.

On March 2 page 46, on a column, written by Seth Akintoye, were unsupported claims and extreme positions about HIV/AIDS. Seth will want us to believe that Malaria is more of a problem than AIDS. In addition, he was quick to blanket all the organizations working at creating awareness about HIV/AIDS as crooks. While he has a right to his opinion on issues, he also has a right to give accurate

and unbiased information. His view largely undermines the enormous challenge of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. Funny, Seth column occupy a half page. While we admit that there are crooks in the HIV intervention, likewise there are spirited and committed individuals and organizations that deserve commendation.

The Punch did a beautiful analysis on Voluntary counseling and Testing (VTC) on Page 14, March 1. This effort is commendable. It is however sad that this was the only effort during the period that we monitored. It would have been lovely if they have continued in this fashion, but two stories, which appeared on February 16, one of it says "Getting people with HIV/AIDS avoid risky sexual behavior" The story came with a photograph of activists boldly written on their chests "AIDS KILLS" It becomes curious because one would wonder if it is only people with HIV that needs to practice safe sex. With a photograph as negative as that, the impact could best be imagined. The story was also cloned from the New York Times, which could raise the question of whether the focus as it is does not have local equivalents that could be adapted by our media.

The second story referred reads; "UK may deny TB, HIV patients Visa" The story was prominently used, but fails to question a discriminatory policy in question. There was no attempt to analyze the positivity or negativity of this controversial decision. It is significant to note that the 1992 World AIDS Conference was moved out of the United States to protest her immigration policy toward HIV infected persons. Such mandatory and non-consensual testing is against the WHO's recommendations for AIDS Control Programmes. They represent a breach of the right to privacy, confidentiality, choice and dignity of the human person. Such analysis could have helped in shaping policy shift, but here, that opportunity was lost.

Lastly, is the March 3 report on page 13, which comes with this caption "Controversy trails PLWHAs Bill" The report was about the discriminatory bill before the House of Assembly in Rivers State. In the report, there was no such controversy to warrant the headline. The cause of disagreement was about the section that requires hotel owners to provide condoms for their guest, which some members are kicking against in the name of morality. We would have expected the story to look at the issue in the light of the enormity of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria and relate it to the different views expressed by members. Again, this was not the case but it readily screams PLWHAs and Controversy.

We are mindful of the fact that Punch provides a column on Sundays anchored by Rolake Nwagwu, a positive activist and like all the other media are committed to this challenge, and we commend this effort and the impact their commitment is having but we must be able to say confidently that our media is above board.

The Guardian

We shall begin a look at the Guardian, which published 30 stories, with a rejoinder to its editorial published on January 11, page 75. It says “The Guardian Editorial on HIV/AIDS Scourge” Scourge as defined is a source of great suffering. Implied meaning like this definitely adds to the apathy that the people already have for HIV.

On January 27, on page 56, the Guardian also has a story that read, “NAICOM warns insurers on HIV/AIDS cover”. The story was about the directive from the umbrella insurance body, NAICOM to insurance company to be wary of providing cover to people living with HIV/AIDS. One of the reasons advanced was because HIV is a declining disease. In this instance, the flagship did not see a reason to follow up on this story, which in its entire ramification pertains to the human rights of positive persons. Section 31 of our constitution guarantees the right of individual from discrimination. It is clear from stories like this that the media must brace up to its duties. Why would an umbrella body for insurance issue such directive, on what is it basing its arguments and why will people living with HIV single out for this treatment when there are many other health conditions that are even more serious than AIDS? These are questions the story could have helped us answer.

Another story of the Guardian that captures my fancy was the one of January 31, page 11 it says “British ex-minister test HIV positive”. From the body of the story, the headline is total misinformation. The story is an opportunity the Guardian missed to project the normalcy of HIV to the people. The minister in question was coming out for the first time after 17 good years of testing positive to HIV. He had coped well despite the rigor of office. This much he testified. Smith 53 has been positive since he was 36. If he did not come out no one will know. This goes against the regular notion that HIV is death. Even in Nigeria, there are people who have lived with HIV for 15 years and they are still bubbling. A great expose on this reality would have been wonderful, but again we missed the opportunity. The caption as it is once again alarmed the people and fuels their fear of HIV/AIDS. It also implies the disease as shameful.

The paper carried an analysis titled “HIV prevention, Condoms and misleading experts” on January 31, page 65. The report is good, although it was an outsider’s contribution. We expect efforts like this emanates from media organizations themselves. The Guardian as a very influential medium and occupies a strategic position to change the perception of the people. Investigative reports about different issues on HIV will go a long way to sway perceived misconceptions.

The Guardian again chooses a day meant to express love, February 14, for a report titled "Ebonyin raises team to tackle AIDS". In the body of the story, it says, "A spiritually alert person would not indulge in immorality that is a major disposing behavioral tendency of infection". Such report as this will only be given basis for the widely held view that people who are living with HIV do not deserve our love and support because the condition is a punishment for their immoral behavior. As much as we know this to be false, it will reinforce this opinion. Journalists are meant to correct inaccurate explanations and misinformation, this much we should strive to do.

In its March 15 report, page 27, it said "AIDS: crossing a long bridge to freedom". The caption of course is suggesting that those who are positive are in bondage or like prisoners or those in captivity require freedom. Not yet done, it came with a very horrific picture showing a mother in despair and a dying daughter. With reports like this what better fuel does stigmatization requires? This angle of the story swallowed any relevance the story could have had.

On page 36, March 3, also comes a story "Researcher discovers new therapies against AIDS" It was a good story but words like "potent arsenal against a dreaded virus" etc could have been avoided.

Finally, for the purpose of analysis we shall consider the story of February 28, which says "Government to treat 250,000 persons with AIDS by 2006". Much as the story is a good report that holds promise, it also misinforms. As of now, HIV/AIDS as a health condition is without cure, but there is already great stride to considerably prolong the lives of those infected, to suggest *treat by 2006*, may again send the wrong impression. As it appears in this context, it signifies a cure. It is instructive to stress that stereotyped impression that have taken root over time will be difficult to change, unless persuaded by new vistas of learning. That is the more reason why the media must strive to discharge its duties in the best possible method.

New Age Newspaper

New Age carried the highest number of stories on HIV/AIDS despite the fact that it is the least in volume. It also appears as the paper with a policy to educate the people about HIV/AIDS. This is because it has a whole page dedicated to reporting HIV on a weekly basis, aside of the regular reportage. In all, it published a total of 55 stories within the 10 weeks period. The inappropriate use of words that fuels stigmatization and which undermine the rights of positive people however did not leave out this paper (refer to samples).

During the period in focus, it was the only paper that carried an editorial about a contentious issue about certifying and endorsing anti-retroviral drugs. Given the

controversy and the importance of this issue in the HIV/AIDS challenge, it is an appropriate response worthy of emulation. The editorial appeared on January 19.

A story analysis which also appears on January 20, about resident doctor's strike and its effect on HIV/AIDS is also worthy of mention.

However, the positive column in the weekly page would do better as a diary of how Jumai, a positive activist is living positively with HIV/AIDS. Jumai has been positive for at least five years; she is healthy and bubbling, and full of life. A projection of this reality will do more, than if she joins in the normal education, which everyone is doing. She is strategically placed to communicate better.

The position her column occupies on the page also needs to be reviewed. Most time, the column is relegated to the background, while reports of seminars or workshops take centre stage.

We must also commend the sensitivity of NewAge in captioning its headline, and it would be lovely if this were consciously applied at all time. For example, a story on Wednesday, February 10 reads "US votes N72.6million for HIV/AIDS campaign". Instead of "US votes 72.6million to fight HIV/AIDS". Unlike their February 24, page six report which says "Ebonyi intensify war on HIV/AIDS".

Also on February 10, there was a report also on clinical trial of drugs, which was a wonderful analysis, and which raised serious human rights issue coming under the caption "Obasanjo must hear this". If the human right bent of the story had surfaced on the headline, it would have had a great impact. Chances are that without the fact that we are monitoring, possibility is high we will not take the story serious because of the headline.

Also on February 17, page 17, the story was captioned "Stigma and discrimination: second epidemic to HIV/AIDS" It came with a picture that screams "Help fight HIV/AIDS". HIV is something we all must embrace rather than fight.

March 3, page 3 also saw a report of a sensitization workshop on HIV at Owerri, the article focuses on the human rights dimension of HIV but it was inconclusive and no effort was made as to a reason. The report has a lot in terms of education, but we lost that opportunity. We also witnessed same photograph being used on different stories to depict different event.

March 7 also had a story that says "HIV, man's greatest health problem". With the knowledge that with proper intervention HIV becomes manageable, such headline will seem uninformed. It also stands to send the wrong signal.

The broadcast media

Our searchlight was concentrated on two Radio Stations. We settled for Radio because we are aware that it is the sure source of information and education for over 70% of the people.

Radio Lagos, 107.5FM

The station is the State owned medium. The first thing we realize when we commenced monitoring was that the station does not follow the program schedule it gave us to monitor. This gave us a lot of problems following their programs. Eventually we got used to their flow. The Radio service of Lagos state does not have a single program devoted to HIV in spite of the situation of Lagos when it comes to HIV. Aside of their news reports and occasional news analysis and reports nothing much about HIV/AIDS goes on in the station. During the period of monitoring we recorded two jingles meant as warning and education on HIV. Like one of them below in Yoruba language.

En le nibeyen o, oruko mi ni Aderonke Afolabi, emi ti se ayewo ara mi, mo si mo wipe mo ni arun HIV, ko tumo siku fun ni o, o se se ki eniyan gbe aye pelu idunnu, sibe sibe, ti eniyan ba ri itoju ati iranlowo lasiko, mo ro yin ki e ma ta eni to ni arun yi nu, e lo se ayewo ti yin na, ki e le mo itoju to muye.

Eni ogbon pa o ton kan, eni aigbon pa lo po ju, ti o ba se ayewo ara re lati mo boya oni kokoro HIV tabi AIDS, anfani itoju to pe ye si wa fun o ju bi kokoro na ba ti di ogbologbo so o lara lo. Lo se ayewo ara re loni, ki o bo lowo iberu lai nidi.

The messages as it is, appeared drawl and lack conviction. If delivered in a more confident manner it could have more impact. The positive actor, Aderonke, should actually deliver the second stanza because this is the aspect that talked about care and support and possibility of life. A testimony from someone who has had the experience will have more meaning. We also noticed here that the station does not bother to translate this message into *Eegun* and English, the other language of the listeners of the station, we are not sure if this is deliberate. It is also clear that there is need to differentiate between HIV and AIDS as no effort was made in the jingle to do so. It also talked about intervention (itoju ti o ye) but did not say what this means.

There was another call for people to go for Voluntary Testing and Counseling, which is good, but it also in Yoruba language leaving out once again the *Eegun* and English listeners.

On February 2, Temitayo Ibrahim of the station did an analysis, also in Yoruba but it was replete with stigmatizing clichés like *Adanu nla*, *padanu*(great loss, unsubstantiated loss), and also has negative bent. Focus should be made to talk

about the normalcy of this disease, as this is the only way the people can change their attitude. HIV is a challenge we must all embrace rather than fight or engage in war.

We also capture on *Ogegele*, another of their issue program a focus on HIV also anchored by Aderonke on January 19. However, it could have been better if that opportunity was used to actually talk about how in particular Aderonke has coped with HIV rather than the attempt to start on the elementary what is HIV definition, which was what the program appears to do.

Radio Lagos as a matter of urgency needs to design educative jingles that will cut across all the listeners of the station. In particular there is need to design a program that will be solely dedicated to HIV/AIDS. We are offering our services here free of charge to assist in this regard. More insightful analysis should be done instead of the home video and musical programs that have captured all the slots of the stations.

RAY POWER

This station demonstrated a commitment which is worthy of mention. Aside of the sponsored jingles aired on the station by Society for Family health (**I need to know SFH**-reproductive health drama series), it also developed series of its own educative jingles. The station however does not have a single program devoted to reporting HIV/AIDS.

We first monitored an interactive phone in program **Soul nade**, on January 20; it looks at HIV/AIDS in the family after separation and reunion. As commendable as the program is, it also has the disadvantage of presenting different uninformed opinion and positions about HIV/AIDS. This largely will generate more confusion rather than education. It is better we have expert and positive actors in the house and participants phone in and their reservations and opinions dealt with by those who know.

Let us examine and analyze the six different messages aired by Ray power on HIV and series of their news analysis. Some of the jingles were however developed towards the end of our monitoring. It is also the case that all the jingles were in English, neglecting listeners that cannot communicate in the language.

Messages

1. Let me ask you a question, have you gone for an HIV / AIDS status test? Does it mean you know your status? Do you contain and control progression in AIDS? Go for an HIV test today (charley boy say so.)

Observations

The language here is blurred and may not have the desired effect

Using positive actors for messages will drive home the point, instead of *Charley boy say so*. Except, of course we are saying Charley boy is positive.

Contain or control Progression in Aids is ambiguous and does not convey a definite message, and could be rather confusing for an already confused listener. Efforts should be made to do an all out educative jingle and we should be mindful of our style of presentation.

2. It is not my problem, people like me cannot get AIDS, I have never heard any youth getting HIV or AIDS, and it just don't happen to us. Think, think, and think again, HIV / AIDS is real. Live responsible.

Observation-the message here should have ended with a young person who is positive, countering their opinion. I.e. to say-, *you are wrong you know* and talk about her own experience before the *think, think, and think again*.

3. Go for an HIV status test today

Observation

The message did not specify why a test is desirable. This is an opportunity to educate the people about what they stand to gain rather than lose when they decide on knowing their status.

4. Testing positive to HIV is not a death sentence, there is life after testing positive to HIV; you can make life better for those living with HIV / AIDS. Show little love.

Observation

The message did not specify how HIV is not a death sentence, having in mind the mindset of the people. A positive actor could prove all this with his/her testimony

5. People living with HIV / AIDS are as much human being as you and I, do not stigmatize them, do not discriminate against them, at home, at work, at school or at church. Charley boy say so

Observation

A scenario that goes against stigmatization and discrimination would just have been perfect, like the SFH ad (phone in jingle) on how one could not contract HIV.

6. AIDS has no known cure, let's say no to it

Observation

It should have also shown how we could say no to it. Then what meaning is the word **no** conveying here?

I must mention that some news analysis carried out by the station on HIV deserves commendation and efforts should be made to have more of this type of focus. Especially the effort by **Okechukwu Eze** on March 14, 2005 and March 2, 2005. The analysis is participatory, involved critical stakeholders and educative. Efforts like this could help in changing perception and the established stereotypes about HIV and those living with it.

General Observation

From the results of our 60-Day monitoring, we are confident to say that the following are discernable patterns in the media today regarding the coverage of HIV/AIDS:

- A lack of awareness of human rights protocols by reporters which in turn make it difficult to deal with the same ignorance among positive people. The immediate implication of this is the lack of willingness among many to pursue cases of human rights abuses.
- Inadequate data and other background resources largely because journalists lack the facilities or are unable to engage in research. (*As one of the prominent HIV/AIDS positive persons rightly observed, "the issue of poor reportage in the media is as a result of the fact that journalists don't go out of their way to research, they only accost you for your views when they see you at events. No one will make effort to visit your office for clarifications. Look at the negative pictures they resort to using, it is convenient for them because they can enter a site and just download"*)
- A serious ethical problem in the media today due which is helping to under-privilege important stories to those that apparently can generate better revenue for the medium
- Absence of clear standards in human rights reporting.

- A fundamental lack of education on human rights reporting, instruments and institutions.

Recommendations

Projekthope wishes to call, as a matter of urgency, a series of human rights training for journalists. The best way to frame human rights stories is to show the direct impact on people's lives.

Funding should be made available to continue monitoring effort; it will put our media on their toes when they know some people are concerned and interested in what they report. Focus should also include programs being executed by NGOs.

Establishing a databank of resource materials that members of the media can access to enrich their reports and analysis on HIV/AIDS coverage.

Better collaboration between media and human rights NGOs working on HIV issues in designing better coverage philosophies and methodologies.

Setting up of an HIV/AIDS desk as it is in Newspaper houses and devoting programs in both Radio and TV stations that focuses solely on HIV/AIDS issues.

Training positive persons about human rights and instruments that guarantee same.

Designing training curricula for teaching HIV/AIDS in journalism programs of polytechnics and universities

Achievements from the project

During the course of the monitoring, we initiated communications with some media organizations about collaborative effort between them and Projekthope. We are happy to announce that this effort has been yielding dividends. As from the next edition of **Ovation International Magazine** in April, we shall be filling a page every other month to report HIV/AIDS. We have anchored a half page in **Global Excellence Magazine** since we started this project. We are also in discussion with Channels Television about collaboration to present a weekly HIV/AIDS program to be anchored by a positive activist.

We have secured the participation of notable HIV/AIDS activist, social and Health workers as contributors to a quarterly HIV/AIDS magazine (*Positive Living*) which is our own intervention as a demonstrative HIV/AIDS reporting

strategy, which will help people live well with the illness, cope better with the condition and correct the misinformation and negative portrayal. We are hopeful that the few organizations we have approached to sponsor this effort will not disappoint us.

Over cap

By protecting human rights, it is possible to help prevent HIV; safeguard the dignity of people living with, and affected by the virus; and mitigate the personal and societal impact of the epidemic.

We must demonstrate a commitment to engage actively and meaningfully with people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. We must educate them about their rights, and allow them to seek advice and help to enforce those rights; we must be ready to listen to positive people whatever the differences of view. We must also be ready to support them in a practical and unbiased manner.

Finally, we must work to build a healthy and vital civil society that will support efforts to advance human rights in the context of HIV.

In conclusion, I wish to commend the efforts of the media on HIV/AIDS; it is difficult quantifying their contribution to the little that has been achieved. I humbly request forgiveness for any error or omission that might have occurred from this effort. Ours is a sincere commitment to impact the community of positive people in Nigeria and we realize that for this to happen all concerned must work together in unison.

We also thank **Freedom House** for their commitment to develop the capacity of a young organisation like ours and we hope other organisations will see the wisdom in such decision. Together we can make life more meaningful for this vital, daily increasing population.

Thank you,

**Steve Aborisade,
For Projekthope.**

The media in May-2005

In May 2005, from the four print media that we monitored, we could rightly label May as the **month of war on HIV** going by descriptions in reportage that will want us see the effort of containing the challenges of HIV as a **fight in a war**. Personally, I will want to believe that the HIV challenge is one to be embraced rather than fought if we plan to achieve any meaningful result. It is from fighting it that we are where we are in Africa. Instructively, we notice a reduction in the use of some adjectives that tend to fuel stigmatization in media reports. This is a good development, but it must be sustained. However, some reports are still very unmindful and outrightly insensitive to the plight of PLWHAs by employing derogatory adjectives in explaining and describing HIV and those living with it.

Content analysis

We shall attempt our analysis with few of the reportage from the four media in focus. In this regard, we shall begin with the **Guardian Newspaper** regarded as the flagship of the Nigerian Press. And coming from the Guardian of May 29, 2005 page 8 is a report which says – **“President meets Libyan children over HIV infection row”**

The story is about five female Bulgarian nurses and a Palestine Doctor sentenced to death by firing squad for deliberately giving HIV tainted blood to 426 children. Some 50 children have died according to authority.

From our observation, this story was just treated as another piece of news – There was no comment as in a follow up on the human rights implication of this story. It would have been another opportunity to examine HIV among children. This could have led to an examination of the reality on ground, especially in Nigeria. It could have raised some issues – 4 million orphaned by HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. Could this have been mainly as a result of mother to child transmission or through our medical delivery system? A follow up could have provoked new discussion, raise interest and bring attention to this issue. But after satisfying the traditional five Ws and H, the issue was rested.

Coming on its heel is another story of the Guardian of May 17, page 92 which reads-

“Okocha to reach out to AIDS patient”

The caption here is like a mockery of the issue at hand. Like a people who have been hit by a natural disaster (the *tsunami* would be perfect here). *Super rich captain of the SuperEagles is reaching out with relief materials* – that’s the immediate meaning that can be deduced from the headline – The intro also reads – “*The AIDS pandemic in Africa has been likened to a runaway train tearing through the heart of the continent*” – Throughout the half page report, there was no where Okocha committed a penny from “the about 35,000 pounds weekly pay he collects from Bolton wanderers, while he shudders at what is happening at home where thousands more of his country men will *perish* before they have even reached their teens”

This piece shows a total lack of understanding and appreciation of the enormous challenge of HIV/AIDS and the writer is really not familiar with the reality. It is important that journalists take the pain to understand critical issues that are pertinent in the holistic effort at overcoming this enormous challenge.

Then is another report which says “**Nigerian prostitutes as a case study for AIDS**”. Guardian, May 8.

Here, we are told of how the “future of medicine and one of the brightest hopes for a cheap and effective HIV/AIDS prevention is in the hands – actually between the legs of Nigerian prostitutes”.

And the report in one of its conclusion says “if the Nigerian experiment succeeds, the use and marketing of condoms will be put to a rough test”

As is obvious from this six column story, there were serious issues of human rights and also of ethics raised. Of course reference was made of similar trials in Thailand where the object of research involved animals. But of course, as indicated in the report, Professor Short and his team are so excited about the easy availability of Nigerian Prostitutes willing to allow researchers use them – The report was silent on whether professor Short is following laid down procedures, and if the consents of the prostitutes that they got was an informed one – These are issues this report would have helped us answer considering the wider implications that could arise if this turn out to be another failed expedition.

The Guardian of May 16, page 61 also had this full page advertorial which boldly says. “**Stop AIDS genocide by the drug cartel**” This is a one page advertorial accusing pharmaceutical companies of turning the HIV/AIDS challenge into a multi billion dollars market. We had expected some investigative stuff on the dimension introduced by the ad, considering the implications of these claims if they turn out to be true, also considering the various controversies and political

maneuverings that have tailed the occurrence of this challenge. Till now we are yet to see anything that looks like a follow up to those revelations, either to debunk it or in support of its claims.

However, the Guardian reports of May 16, page 61 which says "**New local ARV drugs allay fears of drug scarcity**" and the one of May 11 which reads "**Govt. raises panel to verify claims of AIDS cure**" are good reports which only could have been made better had a comprehensive reports done on the two issues of focus.

Our analysis will go on with some reports from **Thisday Newspapers**. A report of page 54, May 19 says "**AIDS kills one in three South African**" and it reads "almost one in three deaths in South Africa are caused by AIDS, making it the leading killer" - but also in the story, "a researcher admitted that the report relied partly on estimations"

Our concern here is why we should give prominence to an unreleased research work (the fact that it is unreleased puts a question mark to the authenticity of its source). It also relied on a year 2000 death statistics – Our view is that there is nothing wrong if we make this look like a speculation, which it is. Speculations sometimes are true, but to now treat a speculation as a subject of truth like the headline has done is not helping matters here - most people will only see the headline and digest without even bordering to know the content of the story. We all know AIDS is a high killer in Africa like most other illness like malaria and even malnutrition and avoidable accidents, if for instance we are looking at a country like Nigeria. Dwelling on speculations at this critical moment is only a disservice – to an already gullible populace – this is reinforcing the misconceived notion that HIV/AIDS equaled death!

The story of May 9, page 71 says "**AIDS; Kenya researchers develop animal model**" Like it says "Kenyan scientist have developed an animal model to test HIV/AIDS vaccines and drugs", "this will address the ethical and practical aspect HIV/AIDS research, reduce cost of research and human will no longer be used as guinea pigs"

The objective of the process according to this report is to determine the efficacy, safety and side effects of the vaccines. When we juxtaposed this reality with the fact that Austrians scientist are jubilating because of the availability of Nigerian girls for their research , then one would begin to wonder if stories like this could extend beyond being just a news report and go further as inquiries about what is happening here. Importantly also, questions must be asked of Nigerian scientist, inquiries should have been made of our policies that still allows and support a

system where Nigerians are still guinea pigs for researchers. If Kenya could have gone this far, we believe Nigeria's experience should not at least be too far away.

May 14, page 8, has a commentary captioned "**How to tackle AIDS/HIV scourge**" written by one Ore Damola Awoyokun.

Here, Damola will want us believe phonography is at the base of the HIV/AIDS problematic. The other thing he said was that that condom in HIV/AIDS prevention is not reliable. What quickly becomes obvious is the fact that Damola is not informed commentator which could raise a question of how his piece got published in the first place – hear him "AIDS is a reply. AIDS is an act of boomerang (I don't know what he means by that). AIDS is the revenge of sexual morals on us". Another of his view "it is now a wisdom of medical safety for health workers to treat each patient as if he/she is a carrier in order to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS". And here "now how can a formula be if you cannot control yourself, then use a condom? "Where would somebody get the discipline to use condoms always when there is no discipline to control yourself? What also baffles me is the space given to this piece, because, largely the view of the writer is even not coordinated, and it appears the write up is meant for President Obasanjo. "HIV/AIDS is real, dear president, Mr. president, another point, Mr. president, the renowned genius" etc – for a piece like this to occupy 4 whole column is strange – There is nothing wrong in giving individuals the opportunity to express their views, but when it comes to HIV/AIDS and other issues for that matter, misinformation is definitely not an art. The pedigree of a writer and the information his message is conveying should be considered on issues that directly affects the well being of a community of people.

*On MAY 25, page 53 is another story which says "**HIV kits withdrawn**"

The story goes "A leading supermarket chain in South Africa has withdrawn from sale an HIV self-testing kit after a complaint from the South African Medical Association (SMA). Behind the complaints of the SMA is stigmatization. The possibility that the home test kit could be abused by institutions, including employers who could perform the test forcibly and without keeping the information confidential. Also, reference was made to the need for proper counseling, to assist patients in understanding exactly what the test entails and the test result".

Punch Newspaper

However, in our backyard, particularly in Aba, according to a report in the punch of May 27, 2005, similar kits are being manufactured in this city. What is paramount as journalists is to ask ourselves, what the implication of this is. NACA, NMA too have not raised any eyebrow- what does this portend?

May 29, page 48.

Leading a two story piece on this page is one that says **"HIV/AIDS; cure claimant task FG"**. In the body of this story is a reference made to Dr. Abdulallahi, whose "drug for the treatment of HIV/AIDS was recently registered by NAFDAC". The point was made of "proofs of cure to the level of 80% and response rate of about 95%. To underscore this cheery! news is the second story beneath which read **"Cleric, important in war fight against HIV/AIDS"**. The story is about UNIFEM sponsored mobilization and education for the men of God – The issue here is; how can you justify the *war fight* as indicated here with an earlier story on the same page crediting a drug with proofs of cure and response rate of 80% and 95% respectively – this report could have led to an investigative report about claims whose significance if found to be true could end the agony of thousands who are faced with the reality of living with HIV. It is another opportunity that could have examined HIV/AIDS treatment, access and quality; instead it ended as is usually the case, as a news report.

May 18, 2005. Page 44

"Saved from pangs of HIV"

The story of how Ibikunle, a young positive activist got revived after contemplating and attempting suicide because of his status – it was a good piece that projected the reality and occurrence of this illness in our country, but the writer in demonstration of his mastery of prose described his appearance thus " At first sight, his cheeks look *slightly wrinkled and feeble*, but Ibikunle was full of passion for AIDS awareness", what does reference to his wrinkled and feeble cheek intended to portray? Are faces of most Nigerians not wrinkled and feeble? What impact does the writer want to achieve that another choice of words could not achieve better than **"Saved from pangs of HIV"**

May 13, 2005. Page 16

"Aids challenges widows cleansing"

The story is about a cultural practice in Malawi, and as indicated in Zambia and Kenya. Sex between the widow and one of her husbands relatives. The story culled from the New York Times and occupying a page in our view is not saying anything new to deserve the judicious space it enjoyed. We all know that some of our cultural practices create fertile growth for the spread of HIV/AIDS, and that's not in support of these practices – But the way the story projects our

people and culture as lacking rationality is suspect except we are saying some western practices and behaviors that can best be described as sexual pervasiveness which are rampant in that society are not more dangerous and susceptible to HIV infection than what we have in Africa. We should be able to draw the line and make distinctions. The incidence of HIV in Africa is not because we are more sexed than Europe and America, and this are reality we should project by giving less room to western notion of Africa and its people.

New Age Newspaper

New Age of May 12, page 3 has this story “**Collaboration of State, FG important in HIV/AIDS fight**” When we fight AIDS, we are not likely to win, when we embrace it, (like a Yoruba proverb, to catch a monkey, you must behave like one) we would be in a position to respond strategically to its challenges It is interesting to note that the only commitment, as a fallout from the quest of the Rivers State govt .for this collaboration was Governor’s Odili’s order to both the commissioner for Budget and Economic planning and the State Tourism Board to see how hotels in the state can start keeping condoms in their rooms.

Odili’s order is giving vent to perceived notion of HIV/AIDS as a moral issue. Why a blanket order for hotels to put Condoms in their rooms? What we would have expected is the initiation of a comprehensive program that will promote the culture of Condom use in the state. Are we saying it is only in hotels that HIV can be transmitted? Will keeping Condoms in hotel rooms make people use them? Hotels keep bibles in their rooms, but does it mean people read them?

These are issues that could have come in a follow up to stories like this and we hope we can all see the strategic role the media occupy to effect lasting change.

May 12, 2005 page 19 of New Age also saw an advert by Center for the Right to Health (CRH) calling on people for Voluntary Counseling and Testing. Below is the ad copy.

*HIV can be transmitted from a
mother to her baby*

This can be prevented only if you know your HIV status.

We felt the emphasis here should have been on the fact that **HIV transmission from mother to child can be prevented** (this is the point) rather than it can be **transmitted** as used here. Emphasis on the fact that it can be prevented does not diminish the importance of testing. Reference to prevention has indicated that transmission occur between mother and child. This is a commendable effort, only it will communicate better if we rearrange the focus.

On May 25, page 6 is this report which says “**Ignorance is worse than AIDS**”. The statement which qualifies to lead this report evolved like this.

Question: What gives you the assertion that our leaders hate reading books?

Answer: Certainly, ignorance is worse than AIDS

The answer to the above question happens to be the only reference made to AIDS in this interview occupying two-third of the page. But it so qualified to lead an interview of an author (Dr Timothy Asobele) who was talking about his books. We agree totally with the statement credited to the learned Professor, because he only went on to demonstrate and reinforce his own ignorance about this illness (I will just add that nothing appear worse than ignorance). With this coming from a university Don, we can only imagine the level of ignorance of our people. What we would require of the journalist who phrased the headline is to tell us what information he intended the headline to pass across? How professional can we say his judgment is when we consider the constitutional role of the media and it’s obligations to the people. We have had enough of misinformation and misinterpretations, and we can only improve on the situation by being responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of our people.

Also, on May 25, again on page 6 is this report which reads “**El-Rufai likens distortion of Abuja master plan to spread of HIV/AIDS**”

According to El-Rufai, “the spread of HIV/AIDS is comparable to the distortion of the original master plan of Abuja”. It is our opinion that statements and reports like this undermines the seriousness of the issue at hand. The minister goes further by disclosing that about Ten million Naira had so far been spent by his ministry for the care of people living with the disease. We appreciate the generosity of El-Rufai, but for a minister who can pay a million naira monthly to an aide, we believe he could do better by increasing his vote on HIV in his domain. What the minister needs to also tell us is the level of care that is being referred.

The irony here is that to El-Rufai, the similarity between the spread of HIV/AIDS and the disruptions of the Abuja master plan only ends along the line of comparison but not in terms of commitment and action. If the minister could devote half of the energy that he commits to fixing the illegal structures in Abuja to facing and resolving HIV/AIDS issue in his territory, I am sure he would be rewarded instead of being hounded by the senate.

We must commend the media for their commitment, despite visible shortcomings, we know that our media is a responsive institution and have proven overtime that they are a dependable ally of the people. We also appreciate the conditions under which our media carry out their duties. It is just a matter of fact that the media is one institution that could help protect the rights of positive people by being more conscious of their duties and demonstrating a more responsive commitment to this great challenge.

In the course of our analysis, we may have committed some blunders, we asked to be forgiven, and importantly we would want people to see this not as criticism, but as an innocent tug from a young organization that is sincerely concerned. We can only improve; in this regard we would welcome advice and suggestions on how we can better this effort.

Thank you,

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