

Inform, Inspire, Encourage: A guide to producing effective HIV/AIDS materials

Tina Wallace for ActionAid International, May 2004

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This synthesis presents learning, based on experience in Africa, around the production, distribution and use of HIV/AIDS information and communication materials. It explores what different users want, need and find useful (or less useful) from these materials. The purpose is to guide and inform people working on, or thinking about undertaking, communications work in the field of HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS is a huge challenge for Africa, and finding ways to prevent its spread and to care for and treat the people affected is urgent. However, from widespread discussions with people involved with HIV/AIDS awareness in Africa, it became clear that for many their primary concern is not HIV/AIDS but their own often grinding poverty and that of their families. They cannot act on messages relating to HIV/AIDS unless these take into account the crippling constraints and burdens they face due to their inability to meet so many of their basic needs. Unfortunately this issue has often been missing in HIV/AIDS information messages, and so the messages may go unheeded.

Purpose and assumptions behind communication materials

The basic intention is to inform, inspire, and communicate with people to deepen their understanding and change their behaviour around the prevention, care and/or treatment of HIV/AIDS. These materials usually assume, explicitly or implicitly, that people can learn from written or visual information and then change their attitudes and behaviour. The potential limitations of information alone leading to behaviour change are often not acknowledged, and expectations can be unrealistically high about what information sharing on its own can achieve.

Nonetheless the importance of good information materials, whatever the challenges and drawbacks are, is very clear. People want to learn about the issues, to deepen their understanding and to develop a better grasp of options. A great deal of ignorance and stigma still characterise discussions and understanding of HIV/AIDS, and good information at all levels is needed to challenge this. The information gap is still huge in many communities, and in some countries.

Criteria for useful HIV communication materials

- ◆ *Take the realities of people's lives, including poverty, into account*
- ◆ *Short and easy to understand*
- ◆ *Easy to reproduce in order to use directly with local groups*
- ◆ *Carefully targeted to a particular audience*
- ◆ *Culturally acceptable*
- ◆ *Accurate*
- ◆ *Locally adapted or adaptable*
- ◆ *In local language*
- ◆ *Attractive, using pictures, cartoons*
- ◆ *Up to date, revised in light of new information*
- ◆ *Current and frequent, regular*

- ◆ *Pre-tested, showing what works elsewhere*
- ◆ *Using a range of media – video, dance, drama, song, cartoons, leaflets, books*
- ◆ *Developed in a participatory way*
- ◆ *Free or very low cost, affordable*
- ◆ *Interactive – with workshop notes, study guides, questions to think about, quizzes etc. to enable people to check their understanding*
- ◆ *Testimonies and real life examples.*

While some people can and do learn from experiences drawn from widely diverse cultures, and from religions or traditions different from their own, this is not universally true. It was harder for people who lacked exposure to other contexts and cultures to relate easily to lessons presented from different backgrounds. Most people can learn most easily from experiences and examples drawn from contexts similar to their own. This challenges those producing materials for widespread use. Materials do not cross easily between continents, and even within continents cultural, political and economic diversity often means lessons cannot be easily transferred. The majority of people interviewed preferred materials rooted in their own country, and often within their region of a country. Far fewer responded positively to ideas and approaches developed in contexts very different to their own.

The recent proliferation of materials in Africa is both an opportunity and a threat. It enables HIV/AIDS information to be more specialised and carefully targeted; materials no longer have to cover every audience, as was the case earlier. However, it challenges organisations to be clear about whether there is a need for their materials, whether they have a clear purpose and strategy, whether their materials are relevant, and where they can collaborate over materials production and distribution.

Quality, quantity and accessibility of materials

Issues of quality were often more important to the producers of materials than to the users. For many of the users interviewed, the issue of quality was outweighed by the need for large quantities of materials for widespread distribution. Some certainly appreciated good quality products with nice paper, photos and graphics, or well made videos, which made them feel valued. However the preference was for good looking materials produced as cheaply as possible to ensure the widest possible distribution. Concerns around the patchiness of access and the shortage of materials to share with large numbers of people were paramount.

Feedback and review

User needs change over time and vary between target groups. Ways of monitoring what people want, what they find easy to use, what they find most helpful or valuable are essential if materials are to meet needs, and not simply be supply driven. Many are currently driven primarily by the ideas and vision of the producers of materials. There needs to be a real shift now to build in listening and learning mechanisms to ensure supplies meet real demands and needs. At the moment this process of feedback and learning often feels too hit-and-miss in the field of information dissemination around HIV/AIDS.

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1. Introduction

This synthesis presents learning, based on experience in Africa, around the production and use of HIV/AIDS information and communication materials. It explores what different users appreciate and say they want, need and find useful (or less useful) from these materials. It also examines some of the issues around the production, distribution and use of these materials, drawing on a range of information and feedback. It identifies some key lessons and challenges drawn from the experience of ActionAid and the Strategies for Hope series especially. It is intended to complement other user surveys and reviews.

The purpose is to guide and inform people working on, or thinking about undertaking, communications work in the field of HIV/AIDS, drawing on past experiences. Interviews with a wide range of users – albeit in specific countries and only a small sample of such users – have provided a range of perspectives and highlighted a diversity of needs and uses for HIV/AIDS material. This learning can now be shared with donors, governments and NGOs working in the fields of HIV/AIDS information sharing, education, awareness raising and behaviour change. It is hoped that people at all levels, from international agencies working on HIV/AIDS down to CBOs working with individuals in small communities, can learn from this past experience and build on it in their future work.

The data on which it is based was gathered from a range of stakeholders – loosely or strongly connected to ActionAid – involved in providing, receiving and using materials on HIV/AIDS. They were all either living or working in Africa, or the focus of their international organisation based in Europe or USA was on HIV/AIDS work in Africa. The data have been collected in a number of ways:

- During a review in 2000 of the Strategies for Hope Series of books, videos and training materials (Stepping Stones) produced by SFH with financial support from ActionAid and other donors. Fieldwork was carried out with international agencies and in three case study countries – Uganda, Zimbabwe and Zambia.
- From a workshop in Uganda with ActionAid staff and partner NGOs, funded by ActionAid Uganda, in 2000;
- From discussions with ActionAid staff in UK and in several countries of East and Southern Africa doing community-based HIV/AIDS work, and using HIV/AIDS materials in different countries.

Ideas have also been drawn from informal discussions with some volunteers and VSO staff, especially in southern Africa. Many people have contributed their experiences and ideas through these different fora.

There is a wealth of independent material produced on each of these sources of information. Strategies for Hope have undertaken extensive learning and feedback through reviews, letters and questionnaires about their 16 books, 4 videos and the Stepping Stones training package (Strategies for Hope, ActionAid, 1995). With the support of ActionAid and other donors, Alice Welbourn, author of Stepping Stones, and others have undertaken reviews and developed a learning and adaptation network based on these training materials. There have been several reviews of

ActionAid-funded HIV work, in Uganda and elsewhere. The valuable learning from these is not reproduced here, nor is this synthesis intended to replace them in any way.¹

2. Purpose and assumptions behind communication materials

Broadly the purpose of information and communication materials is to provide:

good (i.e. accurate and relevant) information in ways that are accessible to the audience – through case studies, videos, books, pamphlets, drama etc. – with the aim of promoting changed attitudes and behaviour, within individuals, within organisations working to address HIV/AIDS issues, or at the policy level.

The aims and audiences are often very wide. Yet the basic intention is usually to inform, inspire, and communicate with people to enable them to deepen their understanding and change their behaviour around the prevention, care and/or treatment of HIV/AIDS. The provision of sound information, often drawn from real life case studies, positive experiences and stories, is expected to inform and inspire people, which in turn is intended to bring about changes in their lives and/or work.

These materials are based on an implicit or explicit assumption that communication materials can enable people to learn from written or visual information (including videos) and change their attitudes and behaviour. There is sometimes recognition that more than information may be needed to achieve sustainable changes in complex and challenging contexts. Where this is perceived to be an issue other work may be introduced, including training or active work with NGOs and CBOs able to offer direct support to a range of vulnerable groups. However, the potential limitations of information leading directly to major behaviour change are not always acknowledged, and often expectations are unrealistically high around what information sharing alone can achieve.

3. The importance of information materials

The importance of good information materials, whatever the challenges and drawbacks are, is very clear. People want to learn about the issues, to deepen their understanding and to develop a better grasp of options. A great deal of ignorance and stigma still characterise discussions and understanding of HIV/AIDS, and good information at all levels is needed to challenge this. The information gap is still huge in many communities, and in some countries. Good accurate information is needed to counteract misleading ideas or information generated locally or through sources promoting their own perspectives/biases on issues such as e.g. the use of condoms or the affordability of drugs for treatments.

The need for good, usable resources was stressed during the workshops and repeated by every group met during the different reviews. It is also evident in the many letters and positive responses sent to the providers of HIV/AIDS materials. People use these materials for their own personal use and for raising awareness with their colleagues. They may place them in resource centres and share them with others that way; they may use them for developing training ideas and information sharing at the community level. For those readers who already know they are HIV

¹ For relevant websites see: www.actionaid.org, www.stepsstonesfeedback.org and www.stratshope.org.

positive, such materials can provide rarely found and much needed information, options, and examples of positive approaches to uplift and encourage them.

There is no doubt that there is a huge need for information, well researched case studies, thoughtful analysis, and easy to use materials for local training and awareness-raising. They can promote a deeper understanding of HIV/AIDS and highlight the rights of those affected to equal respect, care and support.

4. Some generic issues to address around the production of materials

There are some generic issues that those involved in producing information materials need to be aware of and address. These include the fast changing context in which information materials are produced and used, and the problems and potential of transferability of experiences between cultures. The most important generic issue, however, is that of poverty. The reality of poverty in Africa directly affects access to and use and application of information messages about HIV/AIDS prevention and care, yet it is often not highlighted or addressed in HIV/AIDS information and awareness materials.

Poverty

HIV/AIDS is a huge challenge for Africa, and finding ways to prevent its spread and to care for and treat the people affected is urgent. However, from discussions with people involved long term in HIV/AIDS awareness in different countries of Africa it became clear that for many people their primary concern is not HIV/AIDS but their own poverty and the poverty of their families.

The grinding poverty in which so many people in Africa live, with over half the population below the lowest poverty line in many countries, is the number one concern for many people. They cannot easily hear or act on messages relating to HIV/AIDS unless these take into account the crippling constraints and burdens they face due to daily poverty and their inability to meet so many of their basic needs. Unfortunately this issue has often been missing in HIV/AIDS information messages, and so the messages may go unheeded.

A drama group working participatively with rural populations in Uganda learned over time to start their work by asking people to share and rank their most pressing problems. While conflict or poverty was always first, HIV/AIDS was often number 6 or 7. They illustrated the reality of this poverty and its relationship to HIV/AIDS through a story from the Eastern region, where conflict and poverty has seen a decline in girls going to school and a rise in early marriage for young girls.

The group presented a play on protecting yourself against HIV/AIDS, directed especially at young girls who are very vulnerable to unprotected sex. At the end they had an open discussion. One girl stood up and said, yes, she knew all these stories and she expected they were true. However, her priority was to continue her primary education. Her parents had little money and they struggled to get her to school. She had to keep her uniform clean and presentable and she sometimes had sex for money to buy soap to wash her clothes to allow her to go to school. The drama group were silenced by the enormity of the problem she presented – even meeting the most basic of needs might require a young girl to take huge risks with her life, yet what was significant to her was getting to school tomorrow. Now they build their work from where villagers or young people start, and the issues of their poverty are always the starting point.

The changing terrain

The issue of what makes 'good' information, what topics to address and what critical experience needs to be shared changes over time; as people learn more about the

HIV/AIDS epidemic there is more learning to share. For example, there has been a huge rise in the experience of caring for people living with HIV/AIDS and the problems of those affected by it, including widows and orphans. The knowledge base and understanding around e.g. institutional based care, home based care, different approaches to welfare and self determination evolve in the light of widening experience; new ideas and experiences are constantly becoming available.

As new drugs are developed there is more information about treatments than there was previously, and issues around access to drugs for treating opportunistic illnesses or controlling the illness itself become more pressing. These issues now include availability, cost, appropriateness and ensuring compliance with treatment regimes; only a few years ago the issue of access to drugs for treatment seemed an impossible and distant dream for those in poor countries.

Similarly, more is learned about what best catches the attention of young people and others in relation to prevention. The focus has broadened over time from young single people, to include married women and more recently older people and those who are partners of people who are HIV positive. Over time gender issues around HIV/AIDS have become clearer, and the burden on women has become more overtly recognised – their vulnerability to unprotected sex because of gender inequalities; their burden as carers and their lack of financial decision making in accessing treatments have all become highlighted over time. In turn the need to address the roles and responsibilities of men and concepts of masculinity, as part of a gendered approach, has become clearer. The crucial involvement of HIV positive people in the response to the pandemic – in terms of prevention, care and support – has also become more apparent, though many still pay lip service to this rather than taking it on meaningfully.

The terrain is constantly moving and developing as knowledge and experience deepens. Sometimes individual pioneers bring new topics and approaches to the fore and lead debates in new directions, often driven by their own experiences or commitment. One of the most frequently raised concerns during the discussions with users and staff working on information and education around HIV/AIDS was how to keep abreast of new thinking and experience. Ways of updating and keeping materials relevant and up to date is a real challenge for those working on information dissemination.

Cultural issues

Another area that was constantly referred to by those living in Africa was the issue of making information materials culturally relevant and appropriate. While some people can and do learn from experiences drawn from widely diverse cultures, and from religions or traditions very different from their own, this is not universally true.

Learning from the breadth of experiences of others was easiest for people who work at the international or global level and at the national level, in organisations used to straddling work from different countries and contexts. It was harder for people who lacked exposure to other contexts and cultures to relate easily to lessons presented from different backgrounds. This poses a real challenge to those wanting to produce materials that can be widely used, and who wish to move beyond reliance on local knowledge and experience.

There were no easy answers to this challenge, but it was clear from the different users that most people can learn most easily from experiences and examples drawn from contexts similar to their own, or contexts where they could quickly identify with key people/issues. Materials did not cross easily between continents certainly, and

even within continents the cultural and political and economic diversity often meant lessons from e.g. Uganda could not be easily transferred to Zambia or vice versa. The majority of people interviewed in Africa definitely preferred materials rooted in their own country, and often within their own region of a country and developed participatively; far fewer responded positively to ideas and approaches developed in contexts very different to their own.

The increase in the volume of materials

A fourth area that needs careful consideration relates to the recent proliferation of information materials that have been made available in some countries in Africa. Some are produced locally and participatively with local people working together, and may be ephemeral, such as drawings and posters. Many are produced by national level organisations working in HIV/AIDS for their national populations, government and NGOs. Others are produced by local NGOs and CBOs at a local level for use in one area or region of a country. Several international NGOs produce their own materials and often fund partners to produce information and education materials as well. Large multilateral agencies are also involved in producing materials, including WHO, UNDP and Unicef.

The range of materials produced is wide and includes international newsletters from organisations such as SafAIDS, UNAIDS and the International AIDS Alliance. There are many examples of the sharing of experiences through writing up conferences or workshops, e.g. by the International Community of Women living with HIV (ICW) or the sharing of experiences of positive people through local newsletters. There is a range of diverse outputs from national umbrella organisations, such as the best practice leaflets from the Uganda Network of AIDS Service Organisations (UNASO). Church groups and individuals have produced services, prayer sheets and reflective articles from different churches. There are newspapers for young people such as Straight Talk and Young Talk and their offshoots in different countries. There are manuals and 'how to' guides, books and booklets, posters, charts and handouts from e.g. Ministries of Education, schools, health workers and NGOs.

Several organisations in different countries in Africa produce videos and radio programmes on HIV/AIDS prevention and care – often in a wide range of local languages. There are many local organisations now producing a wide range of materials of good quality for use within their borders, or in the region. Of course the quality and accuracy of content does vary and not all materials, whether locally or internationally produced, are of an acceptable standard.

While there are far more materials available now, the availability of these materials varies greatly. For many people interviewed the issue had become less the production of materials and more their availability – how to get access to them. It was clear that in some places (e.g. especially Kampala, but also Lusaka and Harare) there was an almost overwhelming number of materials available, though even there access was variable. Far fewer materials were available in rural areas and distant towns and villages. For example, in Kampala almost all the national organisations working on HIV/AIDS had produced their own materials for use in the country, often translating them into several local languages. In the more provincial towns about 15-20% of agencies were producing their own materials, while in the more remote areas very few had the skills and resources to do formal materials production, though many worked participatively with communities to develop their own learning and information materials.

A number of agencies – especially those based in capital cities – are now developing websites and internet information, but access to computers remains very patchy

across Africa at the moment. These materials definitely favour the better-resourced individuals and organisations, which have computers, reliable telephone networks and money to pay for expensive internet access. Many staff based in government and non-government organisations, even in the capital cities, said they were unable to get good internet access because of infrastructure and resource constraints.²

This proliferation of materials in Africa is both an opportunity and a threat. It allows organisations involved in HIV/AIDS information to become much clearer about where to target their materials and at whom. They no longer have to cover every audience, as was the case in the early days; this allows for specialisation. However, it also challenges organisations to be clear about whether what they want to say is already being said in appropriate and relevant ways – or not. It can encourage them to address issues such as the need for their materials, what that need is, whether they have a clear purpose and strategy, the relevance of their materials, and where they can collaborate over materials production and distribution. They should assess the need for their work against the growing awareness that the process of people being involved in their *own* materials production is a key learning experience, while recognising that there is also a role for external material to challenge and lead people in new directions.

5. What kinds of information do different people find most useful?

This material is drawn from focus group discussions with both producers and users of HIV/AIDS information materials in three countries: Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It illustrates the range of criteria people have for judging a communication output, and how they ranked them. The views of national level staff of government and NGOs have been combined with the views collected from front-line staff in NGOs and line Ministries.

Criteria for useful HIV materials	Country that endorsed this issue
Short and easy to understand	Groups in all three countries stressed this repeatedly
Easy to reproduce	Uganda and Zambia stressed this, front line staff and even managers wanted materials that could be used directly with local groups
Targeted	All groups in the three countries wanted these, and it was a priority in Zimbabwe. They felt that to be effective materials must be targeted to specific groups be they young people, married women, sex workers etc.
Culturally acceptable	The need to speak in ways that can be heard and do not offend was stressed by all groups in each country
Accurate	This is critical, especially given the amount of misunderstanding and low levels of information in e.g. Zimbabwe. All three places endorsed the need for solid, accurate materials

² In a workshop at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, UK on participation and power, even the World Bank representative said that WB offices face many internet constraints and they were increasingly using CD-ROMs as a better form of computer-based mass communication with staff.

Locally adapted/adaptable	Most groups in all three countries preferred materials based locally or in their region.
In local language	The importance of this was stressed in all three countries
Attractive, using pictures, cartoons	This criterion was especially important to groups in Uganda and Zambia
Up to date, revised in light of new information	This is increasingly important and was highlighted in Uganda and Zambia, because of the fast changing context and new information
Current and frequent, regular	This was stressed in Uganda and Zambia, where people want a regular supply of up to date information, in multiple copies to share with local groups
Pre-tested, showing what works elsewhere	Groups in Uganda and Zambia asked for this, to ensure ideas and examples sent out were really appropriate and relevant – to show that proposals for new ways forward really work
Using a range of media – video, dance, drama, song, etc.	All groups demanded that information be presented through a wide variety of communications media
Developed participatively	In Uganda and Zimbabwe it was stressed that unless people take part in generating the messages, they will not understand them and the messages will not affect behaviour
Free or very low cost, affordable	This was seen as critical in Uganda, where organisations and individuals lack money for purchasing materials
Interactive – workshop notes, quizzes, questions to think about, competitions	All the groups wanted this kind of approach, using role plays, activities, quizzes etc to reinforce messages
Testimonies and real life examples	Every group found real life stories uplifting and encouraging, useful to learn from

People enjoy a range of media

These include radio, which is highly accessible and has very wide coverage, often in local languages, and drama, which people feel they can respond to well but which is passing and not permanent. Songs were also listed as one of the most popular forms of communication. Many highlighted their preference for materials that they were directly involved in producing, which best reflected their language, culture, context and needs.

People enjoy videos a great deal but they need to be relevant to their context and culture; some videos do not travel well across regions because they are too culture/religion specific. They need to be in languages people can understand. There are some costs that prevent videos being widely accessible, and these include access to electricity and video equipment. Access was far more limited than expected because equipment breaks down and is not replaced and electricity can be a real problem in rural areas, as can vehicles and fuel to transport the equipment.

Internet is a new medium, but again limited in its coverage. Indeed there is an evident and growing **technological divide**, between agencies and individuals who do have access to computers and internet resources who often feel swamped by information and reading materials, and those without access who often receive very little information at all.

Format for books and written materials

Even the most highly educated people interviewed said that they prefer written materials that are short, easy to read, simple and clear with an attractive presentation. People especially enjoy good visual material, including pictures, cartoons, charts and graphs. Case studies, including those based on the lives and experiences of those affected by HIV and contributed by them, are highly valued.

Those interviewed like a good mix between short case studies and narrative, and prefer to read materials in their local language. Many find it hard to read in English, French or Portuguese. Reading materials are being inserted into cultures where reading is still not necessarily the preferred way of learning and communication, and where face to face discussions and story telling are still dominant. A culture of reading to learn at work is not highly developed for many people working in the government or NGO sectors, even less so at community level. There is little time allocated in work places for reading and reflection, though this is something many people said they regretted. The preference (or dominant mode at present) is still for face to face learning through e.g. workshops, staff meetings and conferences.

Targeting

One of the key findings of the review was that different materials appeal to certain audiences more than others, and that the content and format of the book or video needs to be well tailored to the needs of the target group. In addition, the language of the materials must meet the needs of the intended audience: many materials are written in English, yet this is accessible to very few in many countries.

When developing information outputs, it is essential to know the target audience and what kinds of media and which language will most appropriately meet their needs. Choosing the right medium for the messages directly affects their usefulness and therefore their relevance and impact. This is especially important in developing materials for those who are HIV positive or are directly affected by HIV, who have very specific needs for information and support; and those who have no knowledge at all of the issues who need to be guided into the issues sensitively.

Quality and quantity of materials

Issues of quality were often more important to the producers of materials, some of whom had real concerns to put out high-level quality materials, than to the users. For many of the users interviewed, while they do appreciate good quality books for example, the issue of quality was outweighed by the need for large quantities of materials for widespread distribution to ease access problems. Some certainly appreciated good quality products with nice paper, photos and graphics, or well made videos, which made them feel valued. However the preference was for good looking materials which were produced as cheaply as possible to ensure the widest possible distribution. The issue of the patchiness of access and the shortage of materials to share with large numbers of people were the paramount concerns.

For those disseminating their materials internationally as well as nationally and locally, the concerns about quality were high. Many books and leaflets are produced in Europe or USA and sent out from there, making the unit cost of production and

dissemination very high, which inevitably limits the number of copies available. This of course raises the question of where materials should be produced in terms of making them accessible and affordable.

UNAIDS' best practice guidelines, for example, are produced to a high standard but in print runs of only 2000 copies. Coverage is therefore very limited. Strategies for Hope produces far more copies and has distributed hundreds of thousands of books over the past fifteen years, though these are disseminated so widely it means that the number of copies of each book available in each country is uneven. Where SFH has worked with local partners in a particular country (e.g. AMREF in Tanzania), the quantities distributed have been much higher. A newspaper such as Straight Talk, produced locally on newsprint but visually attractive, produces 40-50,000 copies each time and so coverage is much wider.

Of course issues of coverage are related to target audience. Some materials are only appropriate for high-level decision-makers and policy staff and so are not needed in huge quantities. Others are needed for use by front-line staff; yet others go direct to e.g. young people, women's groups, or schools where large quantities become essential. The issue of the target audience directly affects the issue of quality versus the need for the widest possible coverage to the target group. People locally reiterated their desire for good access to plentiful materials above their concerns about the quality of e.g. the paper, photos or design.

Coverage and access can be increased if posters, books or booklets, for example, are written with handouts or pages that are easy to copy and use. People cited the importance of being able to copy photos or one-page case studies or diagrams for use with local groups. Designing materials to ensure that this is possible certainly allows access to be increased.

Issues of power and hierarchy also affect access. Assumptions that copies of materials sent to organisations would be widely shared did not always hold true. Knowledge is power, and scarce resources are sometimes seen as a perk for more senior staff. While some directors placed the materials in resource centres or circulated them to staff, others kept them to themselves. This is a serious restriction on information dissemination.

Guidance on use

Many users of materials want more direct guidance on how to use them in discussions with staff, policy makers or community groups. They want materials they can learn from themselves but also use directly with local people in rural communities and urban areas, in clinics in schools in youth or women's groups etc.

It emerged that many lack the time, skill or inclination to try and distil the key messages from the books and then turn them into more easily accessible messages at the grassroots. They need materials that they can copy and share directly with the groups they work with. They wanted pull-out sections, short case studies, boxes, photos, cartoons and diagrams that were easy to reproduce and share widely.

They also wanted guides about how to use the materials with their staff or peers or in the community. They suggested e.g. lists of key questions to help guide their reading and thinking, quizzes to help them fix key points in their mind, or study guides to be included in the books. People responded positively to all the materials that promoted an interactive approach through the use of such questions or guidelines.

Costs to users

Most users, especially individuals and small and medium sized NGOs and CBOs in Africa, need the materials to be free. Most want multiple copies to use with other local people.

This is a challenge for producers who are now trying to cover their costs for things like materials production, but the way most NGOs work through project funding simply does not allow them to buy materials that have not been included in their budget lines. With the pressure to cut costs by donors, they often cut these budget lines in negotiations for funding. Few NGOs have budget lines for purchasing published and printed materials and resources for buying even videos are scarce.

It is possible to charge large NGOs and international organisations, and many producers of materials do this to subsidise their production and allow them to do at least some free distribution. However, it is undoubtedly the case that in a climate of limited donor funding, such subsidisation becomes very difficult and this has led to a cut back in distribution. Donors need to give more consideration to issues of distribution and access in contexts of scarcity of funding and resources, something they have often been reluctant to do. This has undoubtedly limited distribution and so in turn limited the use and impact of the materials.

Feedback and review

It is clearly important to set up systems to get feedback from users. At present these appear rather ad hoc and based on individual users taking the initiative and responding or joining a network. A few, like Strategies for Hope, have initiated regular questionnaires and review processes every two to three years or so, but many do not have any systematic feedback systems or review mechanisms. This is sometimes caused by lack of donor funding for review as well as the lack of prioritising the need to learn from experience that is characteristic of many NGOs. This needs addressing urgently.

It was clear from the review work that was undertaken that user needs change and are varied between target groups. Ways of monitoring what people want, what they find easy to use, what they find to be most helpful or valuable are essential if materials are to meet needs, and not simply be supply driven. Many are currently driven primarily by the ideas and vision of the producers of materials; there needs to be a real shift to build in listening and learning mechanisms to ensure supplies meet real demands and needs. At the moment this process of feedback and learning often feels too hit-and-miss in the field of information dissemination around HIV/AIDS.

6. From information to changing attitudes to changing behaviour: other issues to take into account

Information is essential in the fight against HIV/AIDS. But it does not stand alone. Learning the truth about a situation does not easily lead to behaviour change, as anyone who smokes and has tried to give up knows. The messages around HIV/AIDS and sexual behaviour go to the heart of human life, making change in this area especially challenging.

This was overtly recognised by Strategies for Hope when they encouraged the development of the Stepping Stones training package. This package is based on the premise that people need to be involved directly with addressing these issues together, and that they need encouragement and support to confront difficult issues and change behaviour. It overtly recognises the gender issues involved in prevention, care and treatment, and gender inequality is at the heart of the package, as are

issues of age and generational differences. The training works with women and men, old and young in 4 separate groups, exploring what the issues are for e.g. young men and young women in their own gender groups. From time to time they come together to “share and compare” their learning and experiences to see how their needs clash or fit with the needs of the other groups, and how to work to improve things for everyone.

The need to work directly with people coping with HIV/AIDS in their lives, their families and communities, as well as sharing HIV/AIDS information, was also recognised by ActionAid in their Strategies for Action programme, an umbrella term for community-based HIV work. This was set up to provide active support to small CBOs and NGOs working on the ground with communities, and to support the information work of Strategies for Hope. Strategies for Action has included, for example, voluntary counselling and testing, support for carers, training and awareness-raising in schools, youth groups, women’s groups, promoting access to basic medicines to handle opportunistic illnesses and combating stigma in communities.

The barriers to changing behaviour around prevention of HIV/AIDS and around caring for those with HIV/AIDS are many. Poverty is often the most pressing barrier preventing many messages, e.g. about healthy living for those with HIV/AIDS, being put into practice. Poverty may push people into unprotected sex with those who can give them some money, or other high-risk behaviour; poverty prevents some communities acting on the examples they are shown of community care for orphans and those who are ill with AIDS. Poverty at the national level prevents the provision of good quality health services and access to essential drugs and treatment for those infected.

Cultural norms are hard to break, and long-term work on concepts of acceptable behaviour for girls and boys, men and women may be needed through training and other on-going support. A whole range of barriers to moving away from risk-taking behaviour was found in studies by SCF and ACORD in Uganda. These included alcohol and drug use, unemployment and boredom among young people leading to sexual experimentation. Peer group pressure on boys to have sex, who in turn put pressure on girls, was prevalent. Often it was hard to confront these issues openly because of religious and cultural taboos, so messages were often not being shared in an open and transparent way. Stigma continues to force people to deny the presence of HIV/AIDS in their families or communities, in spite of much good work around the need for honesty and openness if the epidemic is to be addressed. Unequal gender relations make it extremely difficult for women to assert their right to protected sex, and traditional age hierarchies put young people at risk from older men.

In designing and developing information materials, it is essential to see them as one part of an overall strategy for addressing the problems of HIV/AIDS. They are essential, but not in themselves able to change behaviour. Combined with a range of other activities they can certainly be effective, and good information and openness about the issues have contributed to the declining prevalence rates now being seen in countries like Uganda.