

Telling Stories of Life and HIV/AIDS in Zambia: National Training for Journalists Helps Improve Quality and Scope of Media Coverage

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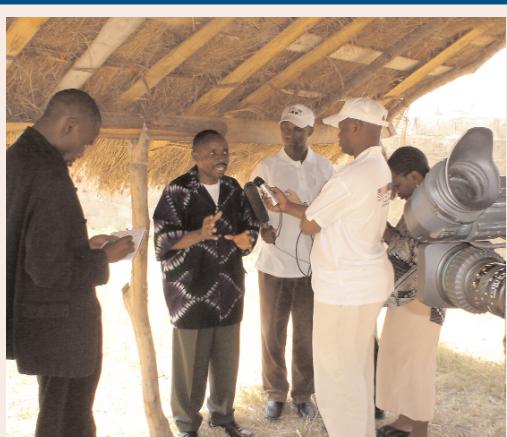
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ISSUES

HIV/AIDS media coverage in Zambia has long lacked the depth and innovation the subject matter demands. Many working reporters have no formal journalism training. Most reporters are unfamiliar with even basic information about HIV and its far-reaching implications for every sector of society. The Zambia Institute of Mass Communication Educational Trust (ZAMCOM) was created to build mass media capacity by training both print and broadcast journalists.

ZAMCOM's mission is to raise and maintain standards of reportage and professionalism in Zambia's media and communication sector by:

- Improving skills and practical knowledge of individuals involved in media production, projection, and distribution
- Fostering effective use of the media in support of national cultural, economic, social, and political goals, as well as the expression of an authentic national-cultural identity
- Promoting an effective dialogue between government and society
- Building mutual understanding through open channels of mass communication



Print and broadcast journalists from communities spanning the country participated in classroom sessions in Zambia's capital of Lusaka before traveling to Kafue and Kapiri-Mposhi to conduct field work. For some of the reporters, this represented the first time they actually had an opportunity to interview people living with, or affected by, HIV/AIDS.

AIDS in communities throughout Zambia. Training materials and additional technical assistance for this project were provided by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

More than 80 stories were produced during the two workshops and published or broadcast. Some 30 more were subsequently produced. Various media outlets created HIV/AIDS desks and initiated new columns or programs. Two participants received national recognition for producing the best HIV-related stories of 2005.



Sending journalists out into the field immediately after the classroom phase proved to be one of the strongest components of the training workshop.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In July-August 2005, ZAMCOM brought 60 Zambian journalists to Lusaka for skills-based trainings facilitated by two experienced US journalists. The trainings were conducted in two 11-day sessions, each attended by 30 media professionals. This is the first time a media training of this type was held in Zambia.

Sponsored by the US government through the American International Health Alliance's HIV/AIDS Twinning Center, these trainings consisted of presentations by physicians, policymakers, statisticians, economists, educators, civic leaders, and PLWHA. They also provided time in the field gathering information and conducting interviews in two high-burden towns—Kafue and Kapiri-Mposhi—before returning to ZAMCOM to produce stories about the impact of HIV/

LESSONS LEARNED

Through the initial trainings and a follow-up meeting conducted in January 2006, a number of challenges that impede accurate and effective coverage of Zambia's HIV/AIDS epidemic were identified, including:

- Limited access to information, expert sources, and PLWHA who are willing to speak on the record about their situation;
- Financial constraints and lack of necessary resources; and
- Editors and other supervisors who claim the public has no interest in stories about HIV/AIDS.

As a result, people in Zambia do not always have access to potentially life-saving information about HIV-related prevention, treatment, and support services.

Combining journalism theory, practice, production, and ethics with expert sessions on HIV-related topics can build capacity among reporters and awareness among editors, thereby improving public access to accurate and useful information.

In addition, government officials, along with healthcare policymakers and providers, need to understand the value of the mass media for getting information about HIV prevention and treatment options disseminated to the public and forge mutually beneficial working relationships.

The training model used by ZAMCOM is effective and has both national and regional implications for improving media coverage of HIV/AIDS and other health-related stories.



RECOMMENDATIONS

AIDS is a story that touches all sectors of society and must be covered as such. Mass media can—and should—work to shine a spotlight on the epidemic's impact on society. Targeted training, professional development, and access to key information sources play a critical role in improving the quality and scope of HIV coverage by the mass media.