Validating the Fact that Effective Information Packaging and Dissemination is a Strong Tool to Mitigate the Effects of HIV/AIDS in Selected African Countries

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ABSTRACT Consensually, qualitative HIV/AIDS information, its effective packaging and dissemination constitute some of the invaluable and formidable paths to a successful HIV/AIDS response. The aim of the paper is to discuss the various dynamics underpinning effective information packaging and dissemination with examples drawn from selected African countries. The study adopted a desktop review literature to assess, debate and critic existing information pertaining to packaging and dissemination of HIV/AIDS. The findings have the following underpinnings associated with effecive information packaging: strengthening information packaging, increasing information packaging prowess, promotion of information policy on HIV/AIDS, strengthening information governance and its management, and inextricability between information packaging and HIV/AIDS. The article makes the following recommendations to engender HIV/AIDS information dissemination messages: packaging to be both youth and globalization friendly and both the government and the private sector to work in tandem to ensure a well-packaged information and dissemination process, if the war against HIV/AIDS is to be won.

INTRODUCTION

Undeniably, the domain of HIV/AIDS has immense literature especially on how to respond to it and therefore strengthen prevention, care and support (Barnett and Whiteside 2006). However, many questions remain unanswered as to why HIV/AIDS since its discovery in 1981 has remained a challenge, with many people still dying and others being unable to work due to various debilitating sicknesses associated with it (Barnett and Whiteside 2006). Hypothesis may be offered, but one critical possibility is the quality of information, the way it is relayed, and how it is disseminated. Incontrovertibly though, the quality of these processes could inform the effectiveness of the response. Importantly, it needs to be appreciated that in the last few decades, information generation especially in African countries has been tremendous to curb and mitigate the sporadic spread of HIV/AIDS (Barnett and Whiteside 2006; Ramphele 2008). Perhaps what needs to be investigated and monitored is the quality and the effectiveness of this information dissemination. This is because qualitative information, mode of packaging, as well as the mode of communication are central towards turning the tide of the epidemic and making a larger population respond timeously and efficiently. Definedly, effective information packaging is a process of conceiving, designing, tilting, recapturing and sieving the messages that are meant to sensitize and educate the masses on the phenomenon of HIV/AIDS, for example, its aetiology, its progression and its ultimate impact (Whiteside 2002). The essence of effective information packaging is to ensure that the messages are user friendly and easily consumable. This could possibly expedite people's readability, access and probably make them develop positive attitudes towards consuming the information. This undoubtedly is a plausible way to curb and contain the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Problem Statement

Indubitably, effective and efficient information packaging and dissemination are the key towards an effective mitigation process of the HIV/AIDS in any country. Perhaps this is because despite relaying a lot of HIV/AIDS messages for decades in many countries of the world, the challenge pertaining to HIV/AIDS remains huge and a threat to national governments. It is

evident that so much information in many countries especially of the developing world has been disseminated using various platforms such as both print and electronic media, and yet people's response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic across many countries in the globe remains a sparkling challenge. This calls for the governments and HIV/AIDS friendly bodies to deeply look and relook at the messages used and how such messages have been packaged and disseminated. This is because even if the messages could be right or qualitative, the dissemination paths and avenues, if wrong, or unfriendly to some segments of the population, could pose a challenge of consumption, and of course, internalization. These researchers contend that relooking at the correctness of the messages, methods and interventional approaches used to relay such messages, the mode and quality of such message packaging, are critical and key to an apparently successful HIV/AIDS campaign in many countries especially those that are ravaged by HIV/AIDS.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Dynamics Underpinning Effective Information Packaging and Dissemination in Selected African Countries

Strengthening Information Packaging

Importantly, the role of information packaging in HIV/AIDS cannot be overemphasized, more so because the battle to extinguish HIV/AIDS still lingers even after three decades of the campaign (Engdahl and Vallduvi 1996; Ramphele 2008; Barnett and Whiteside 2006). The critical role of effective information packaging is to supply accurate and useful information to the audience so that the population can effectively dissect the information and internalize the content (Vallduvi 1993) with the hope of achieving behavioral change. This means adopting prevention friendly behaviors that would strengthen individual response as well as improve community response (Gibbons et al. 2009; Pettifor et al. 2004; South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) 2007). Importantly, information must be contextualized in such a way that it would encourage community ownership of the disease (Gubler and Clark 1996; Gupta et al. 2008; Lawn et al. 2008).

Indubitably, proper information dissemination can be a panacea (Jayachandran et al. 2005) if it can prompt people to be their own solutions to the problems or challenges, and not being mere passive agents waiting for the solution from other quarters. Perhaps more investigation on information packaging should be given more impetus. This is because despite the fact that information on how HIV/AIDS is contracted and transmitted appears to be everywhere in the books, and is easily relayed by both the print and electronic media, it is no surprise that the pandemic is still raging on relentlessly (Idah 2012; Marson and Harry 2008). One aspect that should be critical in the fray of information packaging is to assess its gender friendliness. It is important that HIV/AIDS information designers consider it pertinent to look into gender specific information packaging to obscure all the gender nuances that could be preventing a smooth or effective response. Perhaps this is important because some researchers such as Clarke (1996, 2005) contend that women and girls more than adult men and boys are more susceptible to HIV/AIDS epidemic. When information is well packaged, it should consider such gender inequalities and therefore tilt the content to possibly redress those gender and age demographic gaps (Kang'ethe 2013).

Perhaps one of the effective ways of accurately educating the public about the risks associated with HIV/AIDS is to process localized information and package it in the context of the expected recipients, and disseminate it through familiar indigenous methodologies such as folklore, various kinds of poetry and drama. Such approaches have been used in Botswana HIV/AIDS campaign with some degree of success (Kang'ethe 2014a)

Inarguably, information pertaining to HIV in selected Africa countries still remains a cankerworm that needs to be annihilated (Ramphele 2008). Literature suggests that information packaging on HIV is generic and displays a 'one size fit all' characteristic. This does not promise to effectively reach as many targeted population as possible, and equally does not promise adequate consumption of the messages. Effective packaging that can individualize each of the population segments, be it the youths, the women, and the elderly could be central to increasing mileage and impetus of the targeted messages. This can also promise more information consumption and internalization.

Perhaps why novel and innovative ways of tackling the disease need to be unleashed is because the disease constitutes the majority of the deaths in many countries of Africa (Dorrington et al. 2001; Khan et al. 2006). This is ironical because a lot of resources especially towards buying the anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) especially in southern African countries have been invested (Lule and Haacker 2011; Hontelez et al. 2011; Kang'ethe 2014b). Thus, in ensuring qualitative information, its packaging and effective modes of dissemination could be key towards possibly turning the tide of the epidemic, or mitigating its effects thereof.

Information Policy on HIV/AIDS

Unfortunately, the promotion and implementation of robust policies on HIV and AIDS have experienced their fair share of hurdles especially in the incipient stages of the HIV/AIDS campaign in South Africa (Kang'ethe 2015a; Barrett-Grant et al. 2001). In South Africa, for instance, the policy information packaging was adversely influenced by the infamous comment by the former President Thabo Mbeki at the parliamentary session that HIV could not cause AIDS (Barrett-Grant et al. 2001). This primitive notion by the number one citizen of South Africa could have negatively hindered the packaging of inclusive policy formulation and implementation. Clarke (2005) reiterated that development and implementation of policies in South Africa and Malawi have suffered numerous hurdles and setbacks. These include:
- Inadequate and shortages of required policy development skill on HIV/AIDS
- Lack of understanding of HIV and AIDS
- Lack of information and specific data
- Lack of dedicated staff to run the programs
- Lack of communication and networking
- Finally, lack of capacity building to deal with the issues

Observably, many countries of Africa have not instituted stronger workplace policies on HIV/AIDS implementation (Clarke 2005). This is coupled by a combination of lack of dedicated staff and a lack of specific data and information, as well as shortages of requisite policy development prowess on HIV and AIDS. This has likely affected the current status of information dissemination and packaging.

HIV/AIDS Information Governance and Management

Conceptually, HIV/AIDS information governance encompasses every action taken in the process of information generation, processing, dissemination, and all the associated rules governing requisite behaviors that must be observed (Ku 2008). Importantly, the governance must emphasize the validity of the information content, context and its channel of dissemination and the medium of transmission. Importantly, information design serves as one of the fundamental strengths of the character of the HIV and AIDS campaign and awareness. Appropriately identifying the intended consumer would enable the visualization of the concepts embedded in the message, the choice of words, diction and mode of expression in the campaign.

Information Packaging Prowess

In any professional endeavor, the skill prowess cannot be overemphasized. This is because the effectiveness and efficiency of any enterprise hinges on the quality of a skill used or adopted (Kang'ethe 2015b). Since the major hurdle to grapple with in this century of information communication proliferation is the context of provision of qualitative information to the recipients, personnel with professional insight and information dissemination prowess are key. But this has faced huge challenges, perhaps due to the fact that most of the campaigns launched have been directly or partially funded by government and donors. This might have prompted the appointment of campaign champions, notwithstanding whether they possess information design, packaging and dissemination prowess. For instance, there are some evidences that the current and commonly used campaign practices in many countries of Africa are weak in gender specific packaging, as well as fail to take culture as an important ingredient in the packaging of the HIV/AIDS campaign materials. Culture-friendliness is key. This places the importance of encouraging local participation and collaboration in the designing, processing and packaging of the HIV/AIDS materials. Hopefully, such a process is likely to reap huge dividends pertaining to the mitigation of HIV and AIDS in countries such as those of South African region reeling under the impact of HIV/AIDS (Ramphele 2008; Barnett and Whiteside 2006).

Inextricability Between Information Packaging and HIV/AIDS

Inarguably, an inextricable relationship between information packaging and the quality of HIV/AIDS awareness campaign on HIV and AIDS cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, it is pertinent that resources are immensely used to make and package the campaign messages appropriately. This is because several research undertakings have validated an inextricable relationship between the quality of the campaign and its divindeds thereof and the quality of information packaging. Undeniably, well-packaged information is likely to promote easier consumption and internalization of the messages (Kang'ethe 2015a). Importantly though, various media houses have been utilized to communicate and package information for public consumption, whether visual, verbal, encoded and inscriptions to disseminate and educate the people. This has been acknowledged to be potent and highly efficacious. Inextricably, HIV and AIDS campaigns rely heavily on the outcome of awareness through effective communication. Realistically, communication effectiveness hinges on how well balanced and packaged the information is. This might fundamentally expedite consumption and decision-making process irrespective of dissemination media or platforms, whether audio, audio-visual, leaflets, television advertisement, or 'radio jingle'. For the people to be adequately armed about the menace of HIV and AIDS pandemic, effective people centric information packaging and dissemination is central.

CONCLUSION

Mitigating the effects of the spread of HIV/AIDS requires collaborative effort and commitment of all the stakeholders whether government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in addressing the social and economic implications of the spread HIV/AIDS in Africa. Critically, the quality of information packaging as well as the quality of its content are central issues that are believed could play a huge role in increased community access and response to the epidemic. This means that information packaging is crucial for HIV campaign to accrue huge dividends. The information has to be packaged in a way that it considers important demograph-

ic characteristics of the population, and largely the cultures of the people. Since these are pertinent gaps that most campaigns in African countries seem to suffer, it is fundamental that the government, the private sector and all the HIV/AIDS campaign bodies get concerned with various facts of information packaging and dissemination processes. Considering the environment that will make youths respond as well as ensuring the engendering of the information packaging is pertinent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Engendering HIV/AIDS Information Dissemination Messages

In ensuring effective HIV/AIDS information dissemination, effort should be made to ensure gender sensitivity and gender friendliness of the messages rather than adopting a 'one size fit all' approach. It is important that information packaging is engendered. Perhaps this is because in many countries of the developing world, women and the girl children are infected by HIV/AIDS more than their male counterparts. Women and the girl children, therefore, suffer the phenomenon of feminization of HIV/AIDS, which is a retrogressive phenomenon of development.

Packaging Needs to be Youth Friendly

The global statistics indicate that more youths than adults are prone to contracting HIV/AIDS. This prompts the thinking that packaging information that is youth friendly might be very effective in expediting the youth's response to HIV/AIDS in the contemporary epoch. Ensuring that interventions are youth friendly would entail instituting youth corners in the predominant public health facilities. Since these youth corners are not facilities one would find in many public health centers in many countries especially those hard hit by the epidemic such as South Africa and Botswana, this could be an indicator that these countries' information packaging have not accrued huge dividends in enhancing youth response to HIV/AIDS. Unfortunately, most of the public health information has tended to assume a 'one size fit all approach'.

It is thus less arguable to stress that the current packaging has been proven not to favor all

the demographic segments in the population. Hence, there is therefore a need to reconsider repackaging and redesigning information so that it can reach all the youths as well as other demographic segments of the society. This could be one of the best strategies to strengthen the HIV/AIDS campaign and make it accrue huge dividends.

Packaging Should be Culturally Appropriate

Information packaging on HIV/AIDS should consider culture especially in the packaging and dissemination. There are cultural norms in Africa where some issues are not openly discussed. Cultural values and language are key factors if the packaged materials for public consumption are to increase their acceptability. There are perennial challenges associated with information packaging in many African countries because there is a tendency to have materials in English, French, or Portuguese languages, these being the languages of former colonial masters. Perhaps this largely mirrors colonial hangovers. This has had detrimental effects and low acceptability, as well as reduces access. It would also be critical that cultures are not packaged in a 'one size fits all' approach. It is good to package the materials in different culturally acceptable languages. For example, in South Africa where there are eleven national languages, it is central that materials are packaged and published in all the languages. However, some countries such as Kenya and Botswana are luckier as they have apparently one language that is adequately used and understood by a larger population, that is, Kiswahili and Setswana, respectively. Therefore, it is crystal clear that the way information is packaged could be one of the contributing factors to the relentless statistics of HIV/AIDS especially in some Southern African countries. Ways and methodologies of packaging that will take the above factors into consideration should therefore be adopted.

Packaging Should be Globalization Friendly

Importantly, a workable information packaging for the purpose of dissemination should be flexible enough to fit in into the modern platform. It should, for example, fit in various popular software packages and social media platforms such as, YouTube, Google, and so on. This is to make those with modern information technology devices such as the tablets, palmtops, and smartphones to easily retrieve such information with ease. This means that segments of the population that are advanced are likely to receive the information faster and can access it any time they wish. Although these devices are usually with urbanized and relatively effluent communities, in South Africa even the rural communities are increasingly getting equipped with smartphones and laptops. The increased coverage of electricity in the rural areas in South Africa is making this a possible phenomenon. This means that Africans are increasingly getting a share of globalization cake. However, having these facilities has not guaranteed expedited response. This has left many questions unanswered, as even those who are knowledgeable in issues of HIV/AIDS get trapped in behaviors that defeat their power and potential to respond to the epidemic.

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