

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



MAP Francophone Coordinator Loga Virahamy facilitating a gender and media workshop Photo: GEM PIU

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This is the second major study on gender in media content in Seychelles following the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) in 2003 and the first on coverage of HIV and AIDS. It reveals progress as well as gaps.

Strengths

Among the key strengths identified are:

- Women sources have increased from 21% (GMBS) to 25% in this study.
- Women constitute almost half the sources on HIV and AIDS.
- There are almost an equal number of women reporters.
- There is a relatively high level of original stories being produced on HIV and AIDS.
- Blatant stereotypes are abating.

Challenges

The key challenges identified include:

- Media practice is weak. This is reflected in the high reliance on secondary and single sources; the proportion of news from international wire services and tendency towards short news briefs rather than in-depth analysis.
- Gender as a topic hardly features.
- A high proportion of stories reflect gender bias of one kind or the other.
- The coverage of HIV in the media is extremely low:
- Voices of those most affected by HIV are not heard in the media.
- Gender dimensions of the epidemic are not receiving sufficient coverage.

Next steps

The research underscores the importance of the policy sub-sector of the MAP. Clearly media houses need to develop work place and newsroom policies to ensure progressive work place practices as well as sensitive and consistent coverage of the pandemic. Conducive environments for successfully covering HIV stories and/or developing policies require getting buy-in from editors and media managers. This is a challenging exercise that will require team leaders to have the knowledge and skills. Among the next steps envisaged in the MAP process are:

- **Dissemination:** The findings of the research need to be disseminated as widely as possible and used for advocacy. The study will be officially launched with GEM Plus in Seychelles around 3 May, as part of World Press Freedom Day activities. The findings will be packaged in different formats that are accessible to different categories of people using them, e.g. the media, training institutions and advocacy groups etc. These will be widely disseminated through MAP networks, especially GEMSA, MISA and SAEF.
- **Buy in for policy process at country level:** Workshops will be held with media houses (whose editors were briefed about this research) to get buy in for the workplace and newsroom policy process.
- **Policy handbook and roll out:** The research findings will be integrated into the handbook that will be used for rolling out policies in newsrooms across the sub-region. These have been tested with three newsrooms across the sub-region (*The Times of Zambia*; Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation and Kaya FM). The plan is to ensure that 80% of newsrooms have policies by the end of 2008.
- **Training and help desk:** The policy initiative is complemented by the training sub-sector and information help desk of MAP being run by SAFAIDS and UNAIDS. These will provide newsroom training as well as daily support to media in improving the quality of coverage. Particular attention will be paid to developing links between the media and organisations of people with HIV; as well as deepening awareness and ability to report on the gender dimensions of the pandemic.
- **In-house monitoring:** As part of the policy process, newsrooms will be equipped with simple monitoring tools so that they can conduct in-house monitoring of their coverage and take corrective measures.



- **Reflection and best practices:** The Gender and Media Summit being convened by GEMSA in September 2008 will feature a session for presenting best practices and analysing experiences of introducing and implementing HIV and AIDS and gender policies in newsrooms. The summit includes a call for awards on good institutional practice in developing and implementing HIV and AIDS and Gender policies.
- **Monitoring and evaluation of the MAP policy project:** A follow up base line study will be conducted in 2009/2010 to determine if there has been any improvement as a result of these initiatives. It is suggested that the qualitative component of this include interviews with newsrooms and media practitioners on the process, achievements and challenges.

ANNEX A: SAEF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

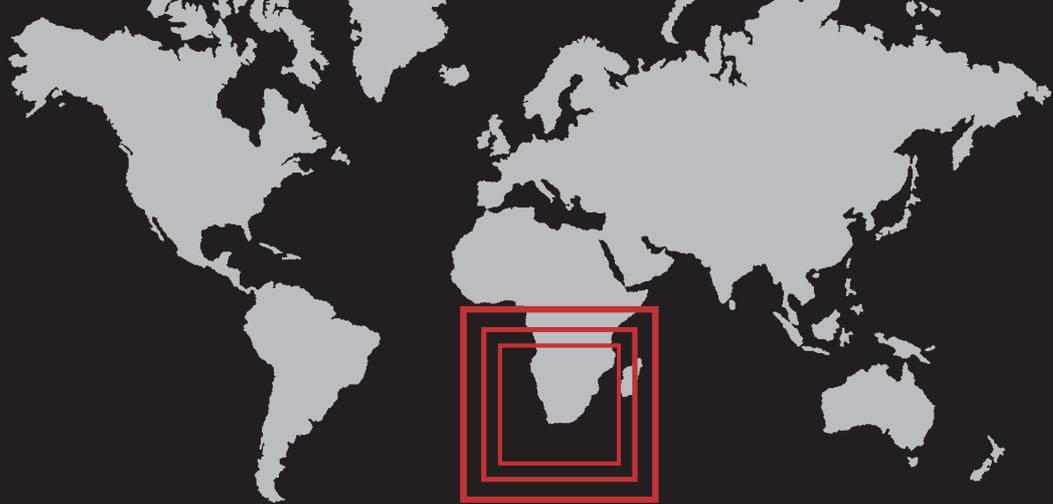
HIV and AIDS is a story of critical importance that should be covered by journalists with imagination, initiative and sensitivity to the gender and larger social forces driving the epidemic.

The story requires reporting of the highest ethical standards. The Southern African Editors Forum and Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) endorsed these principles to provide guidance to media Councils, training institutions and media companies, as well as individual editors and journalists. The principles are not cast in stone but should be revised over time and in response to the unfolding epidemic.

The guiding principles for Ethical Reporting on HIV/AIDS and Gender have been developed as part of the Southern Africa Media Action Plan on HIV/AIDS and Gender (MAP) that brings together a unique partnership between the media industry, civil society and the international community to improve the quality of reporting on HIV/AIDS and Gender, and to mitigate the impact of the epidemic on the media industry in the SADC Region.

- **Accuracy is critical**, since important personal and policy decisions may be influenced by media reports. Journalists should always identify themselves during an investigation, with the rare exception of a story, which has overwhelming public interest. Journalists should be particularly careful to get scientific and statistical information right and Facts should be painstakingly checked, using credible *sources* to interpret information, verify facts and make statistics and science accessible and relevant to wide audiences. Sources should be named as often as possible. Stories should be written in context.
- **Misconceptions should be debunked** and any claims of cures or treatment should be reported with due care. Journalists should look at all stories critically.
- **Clarity** means being prepared to discuss sex, cultural practices and other sensitive issues respectfully but openly. Care should be taken to ensure language, cultural norms and traditional practices relating to, for example, inheritance and sex are understood and accurately reported taking into account universal human rights.
- **Balance** means giving due weight to the story, and covering all aspects, including medical, social, political, economic and other issues. Balance also means highlighting positive stories where appropriate, without underplaying the fact that HIV and AIDS is a serious crisis.
- Journalists should hold all decision makers to **account** in their handling of the pandemic, from government to the pharmaceutical industry and advocacy groups. They should be engaged with, but not captive to, any interest group.
- Journalists should ensure that the voices and images of people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS are heard and seen. The human face of the pandemic should be shown. They should take care that the voices heard are diverse, and include those of women and men, vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- **Journalists should respect the rights of people with HIV and AIDS.** Vulnerable groups should be treated with particular care. Journalists should seek informed consent before intruding on anyone's privacy. They should seek to understand the possible consequences for individuals who participate in their report, and to ensure that those individuals are clear about the consequences. Only in cases of overwhelming public interest can somebody's HIV status be reported against their wishes or should journalists hide their professional identity.
- **Journalists should be aware of and seek out the gender dimensions of all aspects of the pandemic**, from prevention, to treatment and care as this will add to the depth and context, as well as reveal new areas for reporting.
- Particular care should be taken in dealing with **children**. They experience the most extreme consequences of the epidemic, and their rights to privacy should be afforded even greater protection. They should only be identified if the public interest is overwhelming and then only if no harm is foreseeable and they or any parents or guardians have given informed consent. Children have the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives. They also have the right to be heard, and journalists should ensure that the particular concerns they face are covered.
- **Discrimination, prejudice and stigma are very harmful**, and journalists should avoid fuelling them. Particular care should be taken not to use language, or images, that reinforce stereotypes.





The Southern African Media Action Plan



on HIV and AIDS & Gender

