

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“If we agree that changing sexual behaviour is at the core of reducing HIV infection and that efforts to change sexual behaviour require changes in the social and economic power relations in society, then our ability to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic is inextricably linked with our ability to address gender inequality at all levels.”

Dr Cathi Albertyn, Director, Centre for Applied Legal Studies.



Why this manual?

The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is one of the most devastating diseases the world has had to face. The virus that causes AIDS, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), knows no boundaries, no class, no sex and no race.

By December 1 2001, according to UNAIDS, 40 million adults and children worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS, and 28.1 million of them were in Africa. Twenty percent of the world's new infections in 2001 occurred in Africa.

A large body of the knowledge, information and awareness that the general population has about HIV/AIDS comes from the mass media. Targeted HIV/AIDS information, education and communications campaigns by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also played a role in people's understanding of the pandemic. But it is the media, through its articles and broadcasts, which continues to reach a large audience, thereby having a great impact on people's attitudes, as well as on the national agenda set by countries to deal with HIV/AIDS.

It is undisputed, borne out by the numbers, that women and girls are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS due to gender inequality and the power imbalances between women and men in every society. Women and girls also carry a heavier burden of care when HIV/AIDS enters households and communities, and they have more limited access to HIV/AIDS related information, prevention, treatment, care, support, commodities and services.

The human face of HIV/AIDS is portrayed as that of women and girls. The Declaration of Commitment of the June 2000 United Nations (UN) General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS stresses that gender equality and the empowerment of women are fundamental elements in the reduction of women's and girls' vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Gender stereotypes and power relationships also increase the vulnerability of men to HIV infection. Men experience difficulty in accessing information about sex and HIV/AIDS. Society expects men to be knowledgeable about these matters. Many societies accept and indeed encourage men to have multiple partners. All of these factors have been associated with an increased risk of HIV/AIDS for men.

Understanding the link between gender, HIV/AIDS and rights is key to any strategies adopted and implemented to stem the spread of the infection. Strengthening knowledge of this link must be central to any HIV/AIDS information, education and communications strategy or campaign, as well as in the information on HIV/AIDS disseminated by the media.



Objectives of the manual

The manual's key objectives are to:

- Show and create an understanding of the link between gender and HIV/AIDS;
- Illustrate, through examples, how the gender dimension of the HIV/AIDS pandemic has been the missing story and/or misrepresented by the media and other communicators;
- Explore how the media and other communicators can contribute towards developing a human rights-based approach to covering HIV/AIDS, including the importance of gender equality to countering the pandemic; and
- Highlight the opportunity that HIV/AIDS presents in communicating more with men and women on the importance of building a more caring, compassionate society in which men and women enjoy equal rights and equal access to resources and opportunities.

Target audience

This manual is targeted at everyone who is involved in developing and disseminating messages on HIV/AIDS. Using a broad definition of communicators, this includes those working in the:

- Mainstream media;
- Community media;
- Government information units/departments at national, provincial and local level;
- Community-based organizations (CBOs) and Non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and
- Gender trainers.

Research suggests that journalists and information officers tend to have a superficial medical understanding of HIV/AIDS, as well as little knowledge of the gender dimensions and socio-cultural factors which fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS.

This lack of knowledge often leads to sensational or inaccurate reports; the use of facts and figures on HIV/AIDS without providing the context (i.e. without explaining the significance of these facts and figures in the wider scheme of things), and leads to the fostering of stereotypes and attitudes which cause stigma and discrimination.

Equipping those who disseminate information and communicate messages about HIV/AIDS with more knowledge and a greater understanding of the medical, public health, gender, rights and socio-cultural dimensions of the pandemic, can lead to the better crafting of information that brings to the fore the gender dynamics that contribute to the spread of the disease; create more spaces for frank discussions on sexual and reproductive rights, and on a human rights approach to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Martin Foreman, the former director of the London-based Panos Institute's Global AIDS Programme, notes in *'An Ethical Guide to Reporting HIV/AIDS'*:

"... Whether or not they actively seek to do so, the media either fuel the epidemic through sensationalism and poor or unethical reporting, or helps to restrain it by promoting information, understanding and behaviour change. The media shape attitudes, influence national agenda for good or for ill; it educates or misinforms; it investigates or ignores malpractice; and it raises or ignores questions of cultural values that lie behind the epidemic..."

How the manual is organised

Three foundational chapters provide the background to the manual, some of the key principles of training and introduce the key concepts in gender and HIV/AIDS.

The rest of the manual examines key gender and HIV/AIDS issues in topical chapters. They are structured in the following way:

- Objectives, at the beginning of each chapter, that assist the trainer to understand what information is provided and why;
- A discussion to introduce and define the topic area;
- Activities and exercises that assist the trainer to develop approaches for building gender and HIV/AIDS into training;
- Boxes within the text with statistics and key information;
- Handouts of terms and special information for general awareness and knowledge;
- Examples of articles from the media;
- A suggested list of stories for the media; and
- Key learning points.

The appendices at the end of the manual include:

- References of resources for further information;
- List of web resources on gender, HIV/AIDS and rights.

How to use this manual

The manual is intended to be a flexible training tool that can be used in many different ways, from an intensive one week training course, covering all aspects of gender and HIV/AIDS, to sessions on gender, HIV/AIDS and the media as part of other training programmes, to a modular course run during lunch times over the course of weeks or months.

Individuals can also use the manual for self-study, using the handouts and boxes on key information and statistics to build their own understanding and knowledge base as they continue to work in the area of information, education and communications on HIV/AIDS. This “shopping basket” approach should ensure that trainers are able to adapt the material in the manual to suit the specific needs of their participants.

Suggestions for developing the training programme

- Speakers invited to lead discussions on specific topic areas can include people living with HIV, health experts, gender specialists, journalists/editors from the local media. Inviting women and men living with HIV helps to reinforce the personal context for the learning process, while including information and communications officers, editors and journalists who have shown commitment and competency to the dissemination of HIV/AIDS and gender issues from a variety of angles would be a good way to address the media and information “fatigue” issue on HIV/AIDS with those in the field sharing their experiences and solutions. People living with HIV/AIDS also can provide critical input on areas of stigma, discrimination and information gathering techniques.
- Given enough prior preparatory work, a programme can be devised whereby the training ends with a production of a printed newsletter or small newspaper on gender, HIV/AIDS and rights. Participants can spend time in the field and can write stories that are edited and published (based on the agreement with the local daily for deadlines, etc). Radio programmes or any other form of media product also can be produced. This approach gives rise to a tangible product at the end of the training
- Keep a record of the training. It is important to identify a recorder during the training programme who can keep a daily record of the discussion, issues and questions raised, as well as observations on which topics sparked the most discussion, observations on the trainees’ participation and of areas in the module which were easy to grasp and those which seemed most difficult.



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