



Case Study:
**Advocating for Social Change:
 People’s Choice Radio**
 By Kholu Mamahato Qhobela

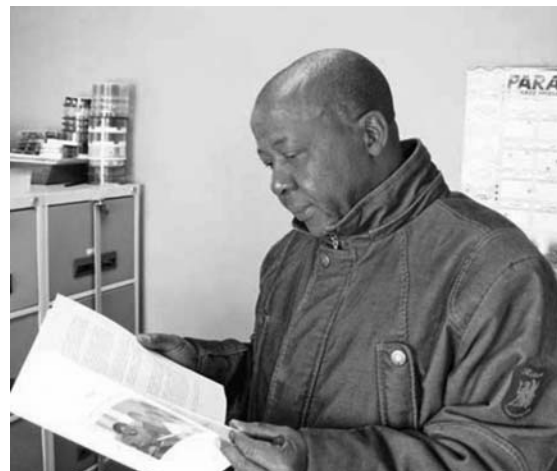
Synopsis

The aim of this case study is to provide readers with an idea of what it means to be living with HIV/AIDS in Lesotho, and how media can be part of addressing the pandemic and related stigma. People’s Choice Radio (PCFM) developed a policy of “know your status” where each employee was encouraged to get tested for the virus; staff was also given the opportunity to receive counseling and proper guidance. The policy extends to cover issues of how staff should handle and treat people of our community infected and affected by the virus who come into our offices on daily basis seeking help.

Brief background

In the summer of 2004 the number of afflictions overwhelmed the staff of PC FM; the organisation saw a number of colleagues’ health deteriorating at an alarming rate. The management of PC FM sat down and deliberated about the issue of encouraging staff to go for a test for HIV/AIDS. It should be noted that PC FM was advocating for those who were affected and infected by the pandemic. PC FM realised that it needed to develop policies that would cater to staff and their immediate families. However, the policies were not directed only to staff but also the listenership.

PC FM developed a policy of know-your-status, where each employee was encouraged to get tested for the virus. Dr. Molotsi Monyamane who has for the past 24 or so years been advocating tackling the pandemic head on, came on air and addressed the issue of voluntary counseling and testing. The station decided to set an example to the nation at large that “YES we can.” They appealed to members of the community, especially the youth, to come for testing on a set time and date at the



PC FM owner Motlasi Majara

Photo: Sikhonzile Ndlovu

premises of the station. The response was overwhelming; the turn out was so huge that we had to move to New Start premises.

PCFM’s mission is to inform, educate, and entertain the public about surrounding circumstances and events affecting their environment; the station’s vision is to reach the entire country through broadcast by the year 2014.

Objectives

Related to HIV/AIDS, PCFM's objectives entail the following:

- ensuring that staff are counseled and encouraged to test and give them assurance that being infected does not mean they will not lose their jobs;
- working towards an HIV/AIDS free nation
- encouraging sensitivity at work place for people living with HIV/AIDS;
- allowing voices to be heard without discrimination
- creating awareness and working towards ending stigma (knowing that my friend with AIDS is still my friend);
- providing a safe haven for the least fortunate;
- allowing PLWHA to live and die with dignity; and
- obtaining coverage of the entire country by 2013.

Targets

The target market is youth. It is a known fact that one of the most difficult and rather challenging things in Lesotho is how disproportionately affected young people are by the pandemic. It was noted sometime back (2009) that about 45% of new infections in the country were among the group aged 15-24 years. This statistic provides a clear picture of the age at which young people engage in unprotected sexual activities.

Processes

PCFM started talking about the pandemic in 1999 when the public was invited to speak openly about their experiences and challenges. At the time there was still a lot stigma and criticism, thus people were not afforded the support they required.

It was only in 2001 that PCFM took a real stand

and initiative to inform the public that we too cared and were in the fight with them to overcome this horrendous pandemic. We were highly inspired by the story of little Nkosi Johnson of South Africa who is no longer with us and died in that very year. His bravery was certainly noted and his story touched many lives; to this day he is a true inspiration to many to speak freely and walk the journey together.

We are proud to that we have a colleague who was nominated as an HIV and AIDS ambassador by Population Services International Lesotho (PSI). His name is Liteboho P. Nkuebe a.k.a Counter Force. He is a true motivator with many followers. He supports the youth and the young at heart through his radio talk shows and has the ability to reach out to people in the most humble ways.

Road shows, media talk shows and fun walks are held to create awareness. Like most campaigns around the globe, PC FM allows people to talk freely about the pandemic through traditional advertising, including outdoor boards, posters and radio commercials.

Other examples include:

- A living-positively pageant - a beauty pageant featuring HIV positive women and men. The pageant aims to demonstrate that it is possible to live healthy lives on antiretrovirals (ARVs) and helps reduce the stigma;
- Organised sporting events meant to encourage athletic participation, interspersed with educational moments;
- Sponsored music and craft events for educational purposes;
- Movies with a message – these are intended to provide positive reception to this form of education; and
- PC FM's story of baby Lerato who was born with an undeveloped skull. Through effort and persistence, donations collected for the child provided her with an operation and an extended life. Her memory still lives on today.

Resources

These consist of individual men and women, companies, international donors and both businessmen and women.



Radio provides people with vital access to information in Lesotho
 Photo: Trevor Davies

Sustainability

The process is currently in action and is still a possible ambition. Our vision is to sustain development and growth in the year 2014 and further beyond up to 2020.

Outcomes

The programmes have encouraged people to speak freely and has created job opportunities for the PLWHA. It has also encouraged people to use condoms, and to help care for those affected.

Challenges

The following have been challenges experienced:

- Countless deaths
- Divorces
- Soured relationships
- Job loss
- Discrimination
- Denial-still projects in cases where people believe in witchcraft.

By addressing the above-mentioned issues, HIV/AIDS victims are allowed to die with dignity and feel that their battle was a joint effort. The way forward is to encourage people to know their status, be faithful to their partners, know their partners' history and practice safe sex.

Replications

Yes! This process can be replicated by others. Many other radio stations are following and also joining in the fight against HIV/AIDS as well as the stigma.

Writers Bio

Kholu Mamahato is the station manager at People's Choice Radio. She holds a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration and Associate Degree in Personal Management and Behavioural Option. In November 1998 she joined People's Choice Radio commonly known as PC FM, and was appointed Station Manager. She is also an active member of Blue Cross Lesotho, and member of National Aids Commission Media Managers Forum.



Artists speak up on HIV/AIDS

Photo: Trevor Davies