

## Media as partners in Vanuatu's national response to HIV

Nicole Gooch (SPC)

Michael Esrom is taking the new journalism course at the Vanuatu Institute of Technology. He is passionate about journalism because he wants to help his country, and is keen to learn more about HIV and the role of journalists.

Michael attended a three-day workshop for media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Port Vila in June 2008, conducted by the HIV & STI Section of SPC, the Vanuatu Ministry of Health, and Media Asosiesen blong Vanuatu. The training, which was a follow-up to the 2007 regional workshop 'Building Bridges in Health Communication in the Pacific', presented HIV issues with a twist to journalists.

The twist was the incorporation of behaviour change communication principles for the first time in a mainstream media workshop. The aim was to get journalists to question their own attitudes and beliefs when it comes to sexual health, and to understand how individuals and communities change in relation to HIV.

'The media provides a powerful tool that, if used properly, can have very positive effects,' said Siula



Mainstream media and NGOs are working together in Vanuatu

Bulu, chair of the National AIDS Committee of Vanuatu and guest speaker at the workshop. 'As such, the media have an important role to play as active and responsible partners in the national HIV response, in line with the National HIV/STI Strategic Plan [NSP].'

The HIV Coordinator for the Vanuatu Ministry of Health, Marina Laklotal, highlighted the complexities of the issues surrounding HIV in Vanuatu, and the need for all organisations, including the media, to collaborate to achieve the goals of the NSP.

The Vanuatu Institute of Technology is about to launch its own student newspaper focusing on youth. Michael and his fellow students taking part in the workshop want to contribute a regular column

on sexual health to the newspaper. By the end of the workshop, they were able to apply behaviour change communication tips to their own reporting, and were motivated to dig deeper, beyond the current status quo for press releases and workshop coverage.

Participants were encouraged by the president of the Media Asosiesen blong Vanuatu, Antoine Malsungai. In his opening speech at the workshop, Antoine reminded journalists of their social responsibility to educate as well as inform audiences.

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## Twenty years of HIV: New challenges for journalists in the Pacific

Dr Trevor Cullen (Edith Cowan University)

Journalists have a core responsibility to inform and educate the public about both the short-term and long-term effects of HIV. While current and former editors and journalists from many media outlets in the Pacific should be highly commended for consistently tracking and reporting the spread of the virus, a more immediate problem concerns how journalists can report effectively on a virus that has been around for more than 20 years, as is the case in Papua New Guinea.

*'AIDS is boring to report – so let's try to make it interesting.'*

Anna Solomon, a highly respected former PNG journalist whose reporting career in the Pacific spanned more than 30 years, once declared that 'AIDS is boring to report – so let's try to make it interesting'. She recognised the seriousness of the unfolding HIV epidemic in her country and urged her fellow journalists to use imagination, initiative and sensitivity to cover the disease.



*There is a need to ensure that when reporting on the HIV epidemic, the wider links, such as with poverty reduction and gender equality, are part of the coverage.*

There are many stories on HIV beyond the overwhelming statistics that often dominate AIDS reporting. Here are some ideas for news and feature stories on HIV.

If possible, try to highlight how governments are coping, or not coping, with HIV. Political leadership has proved a vital component in the struggle to stem the rise of HIV infections in other parts of the world. This is clear from the decline of infections in Uganda, Thailand and the Gambia, where the political leaders of these countries spoke openly and constantly about the epidemic. Their stance helped lessen the stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS in local communities, and galvanised people into action as they defined the struggle against

HIV as a national cause and campaign – which is exactly what Pacific leaders need to do more consistently.

In-depth feature articles can expose serious gender inequality and the fact that if married women are to be able to protect themselves and their children, they need precisely the same things as women need in general: access to education and training, removal of restrictions on employment, access to banking services and credit on their own surety. In addition, they require drastic shifts in laws on property rights, the rights of divorced and widowed women, child custody rights and protection against physical violence. The HIV epidemic is not simply about public health – it is about basic human rights. There is a need, therefore, to ensure

that when reporting on the HIV epidemic, the wider links, such as with poverty reduction and gender equality, are part of the coverage.

Other issues include the fact that with increasing health-care costs in countries hard hit by HIV, there is immense pressure to generate more income through mining, forestry and other environmentally degrading sources. Increased exploitation of natural resources will mean further degradation of water and ecosystems on which people depend for survival, so poverty increases, and the whole cycle of poverty fuels HIV transmission. Also, when family members in urban areas fall sick they often return to their villages, putting additional pressure on scarce resources and fragile environments. But how many journalists would think of reporting these issues? This is not due to a refusal or unwillingness to report on HIV but maybe a lack of awareness about the wider links to HIV. Unfortunately, a narrow conception and understanding of HIV can lead to missed opportunities for wider coverage and debate.

Also, it may be time to shift focus and to balance information with educational content in HIV stories. It is not a question of whether this approach is more effective, but rather a recognition that both elements are an essential part of reporting



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the story regardless of their impact on reducing the rate of HIV infections. Admittedly, some would disagree with this statement and stress that the role of the media in reporting HIV is still unclear and limited, arguing that the notion of 'Better information and education on HIV equals improved health outcomes' is problematic. Also, the media are not always regarded as the most reliable source for such information. The debate continues.

However, the most challenging aspect for editors and journalists in the Pacific, and elsewhere in the world, is to appreciate the complexity and interconnectedness of the web of issues linked to the HIV pandemic. HIV is not merely a medical problem but operates like a magnifying glass that intensifies the exploitation of women, domestic violence, gender inequality, illiteracy, lack of health facilities and the kind of rampant poverty that forces people to migrate. These connections have important implications for political and financial reporters, editorial page writers, television producers and radio journalists, especially if they want to engage in meaningful coverage of the crisis and its broad ramifications.

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## Young Micronesians learn film documentary production skills on HIV in Pohnpei

Etivina Lovo (SPC)



Three short film documentaries about HIV education and prevention were produced by 'young media producer' trainees from Micronesia in a two-week workshop held at the Micronesian Seminar complex, Kolonia, Pohnpei, from 26 May to 6 June 2008.

The young producers were from Guam, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau and FSM (Chuuk State and Pohnpei State). The films they produced were: (1) *HIV Test in Pohnpei*, (2) *HIV Education Begins at Home* and (3) *Condom Use in Pohnpei*.

Amena Yauvoli, Manager of the SPC Regional Office in Pohnpei, said at the opening ceremony that

SPC is aiming to bring training and development activities, such as this workshop, closer to the people of Micronesia and will continue to do so in future.

The workshop was the third in a series of UNESCO Global Network of Young Media Producers workshops for young producers. It was made possible with funds donated by UNESCO, ADB via SPC's HIV & STI Section, and the Pacific Regional HIV/AIDS Programme.

The young producers came with various levels of knowledge and skill in film production and different levels of knowledge of the HIV pandemic.

Horasio Cook of Nauru said, 'The workshop has given me many opportunities. My mind and my eyes are open seeing everything required to make film documentaries.'

'It is hard for us to find this kind of training,' said Raynold Raymond of Pohnpei. 'It is my first time to operate a camera and I have learnt a lot from the workshop, including how to write a proposal for a documentary. The structure and elements of a documentary script are challenging but I learnt through practical work, which is really good.'

Raynold went on to relate how he would use the skills he learnt in the workshop to produce video materials for his peer education work. He wants to change his approach to peer education, saying that just talking is boring but if he uses video presentations it will make the peer education more enjoyable.

The participants' proposals were developed into a film structure, which is when the fun began. They were taught how to use a professional TV camera and how to film and conduct interviews for the production of a professional film, taking them away from the idea of filming family movies.

They went on to plan their filming schedule and went to work in downtown Kolonia and other famous places in Pohnpei, such as Nan Madol and the Kepirohi waterfall.

After the adventure of filming, it was back to the classroom for post-production lessons. The participants sat for three days and nights and wrote and re-wrote their scripts, with trainee editors editing away, while those with good voices were trained to narrate the films. The deadline for the post-production was Friday

evening of the second week. Modern technology is necessary in this type of work and the equipment needed to complete the projects – such as computers – broke down at the 11th hour, adding to everyone's frustration. The Micronesian Seminar, a local media production house, came to the rescue by lending its editing equipment, and finally the young producers were able to put together first drafts of their documentaries.

The workshop was conducted by staff from the SPC Regional

Media Centre – Mr Aren Baoa, TV and Video Production Officer, and Etivina Lovo, Media Training Associate – and Robyn Drysdale, Behaviour Change Communication Specialist, HIV & STI Section, SPC. Abel Caine of UNESCO's Apia office was present for the first week of the workshop.

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## Men as part of the solution towards better sexual and reproductive health

Carina Gallegos (Family Planning International)

**I**t is a well-known fact that gender inequality fuels the spread of STIs, including HIV. Men's power over women can be exerted in ways that lead to poor sexual and reproductive health that we are all familiar with: violence, a refusal to wear condoms, and a lack of support in raising children. Because of this, men are often blamed for the situation and seen as the problem, to be excluded from efforts to change things.

However, there is growing recognition that in order to change the situation men must be involved. They need to be included as a positive part of the solution, not at the expense of supporting women's empowerment, but simultaneously. Imagine how everybody's wellbeing would be improved if men wore condoms, discussed issues instead of hitting, and were actively involved in raising their children.

Instead of perpetuating the cycle of regarding men as the problem, a newly launched programme in Papua New Guinea seeks to deem men as the solution. Clinical Outreach, Men's Programmes, Advocacy and Sexual Health Services (COMPASS) is a five-year programme that aims to carry out a set of activities to address gender inequalities, sexual health and STIs in PNG by focusing on changing behaviours among men and boys. New Zealand Family



Young men in Papua New Guinea, 2006 (Photo by Steven Nowakowski)

Planning International is working with PNG local staff to establish the programme.

COMPASS aims to achieve behavioural change in men's attitudes by actively including and involving men in a series of activities and workshops. 'We have so many NGOs that focus on women and children – yet men, who in most cases are the cause of problems, are not being given enough attention,' said Isaac Kuman, who, along with Samson Pisin, has been employed by the programme as Male Project Officer.

Isaac and Samson will travel to remote areas and carry out meetings with community leaders, including workshops to promote the importance of men's behavioural changes regarding sexual and reproductive health.

'It is important to have community role models

understand why changing their attitudes can benefit and positively impact their communities,' said Samson. 'Community leaders have the power to influence others. They can establish new models for positive change towards male sexual and reproductive health behaviours. Their role is key in preventing transmission of STIs, including HIV.'

By strengthening the group facilitation skills of selected young and older men on key issues such as violence, gender equality, sexual health, masculinity, relationships and family life, the programme's male project officers will train these peer educators to work in their own communities.

It is anticipated that resources on men's and boys' programmes will be developed as a result of COMPASS, providing other agencies that are interested in increasing the participation of men and boys in STI prevention

with information and models. Treatment clinics will also be provided in remote areas and in male-dominated sites, such as prisons and ports.

Working as part of COMPASS with New Zealand Family Planning International are Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia and the Canberra Sexual Health Centre. These three bodies are working with two local PNG organisations: the PNG Family Health Association and HELP Resources.

Launched in February 2008, COMPASS is one of five projects funded through the PNG-Australia Sexual Health Improvement Programme (PASHIP), which aims to reduce the prevalence of STIs in order to reduce the rate of HIV transmission. PASHIP is funded by AusAID and works in collaboration with the PNG Institute of Medical Research and the PNG National Department of Health.

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