Conclusion

Let’s remind ourselves that, with the growing recognition of the social determinants of health, the way to respond strategically – with communication strategies – will necessarily change. Communication strategies applied thus move from an overwhelming focus on behaviour change communication to also addressing policy issues through advocacy communication, citizen involvement through participatory communication and more broadly speaking, addressing the underlying social determinants through communication for structural and sustainable social change.

Education, awareness, information, advocacy and empowerment are five key tools in turning the tide against HIV/AIDS (UNFPA, 2002). Many communication strategies and campaigns have been put in place throughout the world in an attempt to combat rising infection rates, with media being a key partner and interlocutor in the process. However, the success of such interventions has not been deemed satisfactory, due often to flawed pre-planning and a lack of target-audience awareness. As the Communication for Social Change Consortium (2004) noted:

“Existing HIV/AIDS communication strategies have proved inadequate in containing and mitigating the effects of the epidemic. For example, they have often:

- Treated people as objects of change rather than the agents of their own change;
- Focused exclusively on a few individual behaviors rather than also addressing social norms, policies, culture and supportive environments;
- Conveyed information from technical experts rather than sensitively placing accurate information into dialogue and debate;
- Tried to persuade people to do something, rather than negotiate the best way forward in a partnership process.

Progress in slowing the epidemic will require a multi-sectoral response and use of communication to tackle the behaviors related to the spread of the epidemic and to address its causes (inequality, prejudice, poverty, social and political exclusion, discrimination, particularly against women).”

In quoting the Declaration agreed at the 2001 Nicaragua Communication for Development Roundtable, the CSC Consortium was also highlighting the need for development communicators to more adequately grasp the immensity of the problem and to recognize the need to shape messages based on socio-cultural factors while also appreciating that successful communication is a process in which both the message sender and the recipient stake-holder need to be in partnership. Some donors, such as the UK’s DFID (2004), have already embraced new ideas:

“Mass media campaigns, using appropriate communication strategies and locally appropriate idioms, are an essential element [of our strategy]. Top-down information campaigns are rarely as effective as more inter-active media such as
soap opera and theatre, where complex issues and differing views and perspectives can be fully explored and public debate encouraged. Behavior change, and other communication programmes, supported by a positive policy environment, can be an effective part of HIV control strategies and should be properly integrated into national HIV/AIDS control programmes. They need a coordinated approach to communication involving government, local and national media and civil society.”

Therefore, it should be stated once again that, though the decision-maker is responsible for making a decision, he or she remains responsible to the community. His or her right to decide stems from the consent of the community, expressed through the political system. The community, then, ought to have to call the decision-maker to account for his or her decisions.

The role of the analyst or researcher is to assist, not simply a decision-maker, but a decision-making process that has the assent of the community as a whole. In this process the community, as well as the decision-maker and the analysts, are involved.

Therefore, three streams of action are important:
• Media must be activated to build public support and upward pressure for policy decisions.
• Interest groups must be involved and alliances established for reaching a common understanding and mobilizing societal forces. This calls for networking with influential individuals and groups, political forces and public organizations, professional and academic institutions, religious and cause-oriented groups, business and industry.
• Public demand must be generated and citizens' movements activated to evoke a response from national leaders. It may not always be easy to build up a strong public movement around development issues -- but even a moderate display of interest and effort by community leaders could stimulate the process for policy decisions and resource allocation for combating the problem.

Advocacy, in essence, implies gaining political commitment and policy support through organized social action with the involvement of committed individuals, support from influential forces and the involvement of concerned sectors of society. But we will have to understand advocacy better in order to apply it.

References


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