Folk Media Use for Prevention of HIV/AIDS Infection and Spread in Rural Nigeria: A Prescriptive Approach

Leo O.N. Edegoh PhD, Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli, Anambra State, Nigeria
Aniebo C. Samson , Department of Communication Arts, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria
Ephraim E. Ezebuenyi, Department of Mass Communication, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli, Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract: This paper titled "Folk media and prevention of HIV/AIDS infection and spread in rural Nigeria: a prescriptive approach" was aimed at establishing the effectiveness of the folk media in controlling HIV/AIDS pandemic in the rural areas of Nigeria. Anchored on Bandura's Social Learning and Roger's Communication and Innovation theories, the paper explained folk media and their different forms, highlighted the menace of HIV/AIDS scourge in Nigeria, showed how the folk media could be used to prevent the spread of the disease, articulated ideas on how folk media could be combined with the radio for more effective fight against the pandemic and canvassed arguments for the adoption of culture-based approach in the fight against the deadly disease. The study concluded that only the use of an approach rooted in the people's way of life to control HIV/AIDS could guarantee sustained effective prevention of the spread of the pandemic in rural Nigeria. The paper recommended greater use of the folk media in creating and mounting HIV/AIDS campaigns in rural areas of Nigeria.

Keywords: Folk media, Prevention, HIV/AIDS, Infection, Spread and Rural Nigeria.

Introduction

HIV/AIDS is perhaps, the worst epidemic in human history. It affects the young and the old, the mother and the child, the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate. It does not have regard for human race, creed, religion or belief. As brilliantly noted by Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of United Nations, cited in Singh (2006), "AIDS is the worst epidemic humanity has ever faced; it has spread further faster and with more catastrophic long term effects than any other disease. Its impact has become a devastating obstacle to development". The pandemic has infected 34 million people around the world (UNAIDS, 2011). Africa's share of the global burden of AIDS is both astonishing and staggering. Casely-Hayford (2000) makes this point clearer when he observes that "Nowhere has the impact of HIV/AIDS been more severe than Sub-Saharan Africa. All but unknown a generation age, today it possess the foremost threat to development in the region. By any measure and at all levels its impact is simply staggering…"

Casely-Hayford (2000) further noted:

Africa has the highest rate of HIV infection among adults and children in the world. Ninety-five percent of all people infected by HIV live in developing countries and more than 70% of the total HIV-infected population lives in

Sub-Saharan Africa. Eighty-four percent of those who have died of HIV/AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic resided in Sub-Saharan Africa and 90% of children infected by HIV through mother-to-child transmission are in Sub-Saharan Africa.

On the Nigerian front, the story is not different. The number of people infected with HIV in Nigeria is 3.4 million (Josiah, 2013; *Daily Sun*, 2013). The vast majority of HIV/AIDS sufferers the world over and particularly in Africa are young people, the most active group in the population that could have contributed meaningfully to the development of these countries.

HIV/AIDS has no permanent cure although drugs that can help those infected to live with the disease have been developed. For this reason, governments at all levels, the world over, international organisations, regional bodies and non-government organisations spend huge sums of money every year in a bid to control the infection and spread of the scourge. These organisations carry on the fight against the disease by providing drugs to lessen the pain of the sickness and by mounting awareness campaigns to sensitise and educate the people on how to stay safe from the killer disease. The reason for this is because communication is believed to be central in the fight and the media are the key to any successful fight against the pandemic (Singh, 2006). The use of modern mass media of communication - radio, television, newspaper, magazine, etc., in the fight against HIV/AIDS (particularly in rural communities) has not been successful because these media do not effectively reach rural dwellers, or as many research studies show, these media do not have the required impact in terms of motivating change and development (Mukhopadhyay, 2007).

According to Mukhopadhyay (2007) the high rate of illiteracy added to the inadequate reach of mass media impede almost 80% Indian population who reside in the rural areas. Over 78% of Nigerian population resides in rural communities and this makes it difficult or inadequate to use the modern mass media to reach them for any meaningful programme, project or campaign. Attention is therefore shifting from the Western media-based developmental strategies to development approaches that are in line with the culture of the people. In agreement with this position, Desai cited in UNESCO (1977), points out that it was primarily the irrelevance of the traditional Western developmental model and strategies which has led to a search for 'another development' that is based on alternative strategies. This 'another development' alternative strategies centre on the folk media which address themselves to the whole community rather than single groups and which bring people together in common understanding. Unfortunately, folk media is not being employed in the fight against HIV/AIDS at present in most rural Nigeria where ignorance and illiteracy combine to aid the spread of the disease, though it has increasingly been stressed that these media forms can guarantee better understanding of the epidemic and its ways of transmission by the rural folk, thereby reducing its infection and spread. It is against this backdrop that this study makes a case for the use of folk media for the prevention of HIV/AIDS infection and spread in rural Nigeria.

Conceptualising Folk Media

Folk media as a concept is not easy to define because of the many facets of the endogenous media that are often fused or integrated into a unified whole usually called oramedia, traditional media or informal media. The result is that it is one of those concepts that everybody knows about but which only few can define. As a matter of fact, there are as many definitions of folk media as there are scholars of indigenous communication media. However, a number of definitions have been advanced by scholars, which we consider germane. Ansu- Kyeremeh (1998, p.3) brilliantly posits that folk media is : Any form of endogenous communication system which by virtue of its origin from, and integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilisation of the values, symbols, institutions, and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes. Traditional folk media refers to people's performances and their cultural symbols. According to the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) (2011, p. 3), it is "a term used to denote people's performance. The term refers to the performing arts which can be described as the cultural symbols of the people". Folk media consist of folk dance, rural drama, and musical variety of the village people. Traditional folk media which originated as a consequence of people's desire to express themselves also include arts and crafts. KKHSOU (2011) also explains that folk media are a total art created by fusion of elements from music, dance pantomime, versification, epic ballad recitation, religion and festival peasantry. The source further asserts that the concept absorbs ceremonials, rituals, beliefs and the social system.

Characteristics of Folk Media

KKHSOU (2011) identifies the following characteristics of folk media:

1. They have sustained the onslaught of time;

2. They have sustained by changing with the changing time;

3. Any person is always a participant in the performance, never an audience;

4. It is spontaneous;

5. It is flexible;

6. It is cost effective and therefore has enhanced repeatability;

7. It has immediate feedback and increases attentiveness; and

8. It is direct and personal.

Advantages of Traditional Folk Media

The following are the advantages of traditional folk media over the conventional mass media according to KKHSOU (2011).

- Intimacy with the masses: Every community, ethnic group or society has its own traditional folk media which are close to their hearts. This is because it is in their person, it runs through their blood. Hence, whenever it is reenacted by anyone in a society or place, most of the masses feel like joining it and closely enjoys it to the maximum.

- It is physically very close to the people: Most traditional folk media are done in close proximity of public gatherings. Thus, it has sustained greater effect on the people than mass media.

- These are personal media: Mass communication is a highly impersonal medium of communication. This is because mass communication is mediated by a mechanical device or medium. So, they lack personal warmth often associated with and which characterises traditional folk media. The conventional media of communication – radio, television, newspaper and/or magazine – lack the charisma that could move the people.

- Scope for repeat performances: Traditional folk media guarantee better scope for repeat performances unlike the mass media programmes that are broadcast once and simultaneously.

- Regional/local level variations are important: Traditional folk media performances can be carried out with adequate scope for some amount of regional or local variations in different areas of the country. In mass media, the same kind of performance (with no scope for variation) is presented and watched, listened to or read by everybody everywhere.

- Scope for using body language: Non-verbal or body language is adequately available in traditional folk media, and it plays a vitally important role in enhancing the meaning of the message being exchanged among participants. So, the scope for using voice modulations, facial gestures, overall body movement, etc., makes traditional folk media much more effective than mass media.

- Use of local language, customs, etc.: Folk media essentially is based on the local ethos, culture and other aspects of the life of the people. Thus, the costumes, language used and the setting, background, etc., must invariably bear the stamp of that locality and general culture of the area. This is to enable it carry the same effects and meanings for all masses of that locality. This advantage is lacking in mass media of communication.

- It is performance oriented: Most traditional folk media combine music and dances that are performed to the admiration of all. This creates better effects on the target audience.

Guiding principles for the utilisation of folk media for motivational purposes

According to Babara Yount, cited in UNESCO (1977), the following principles, should guide the utilisation of folk media for motivational purposes:

i. The folk media should be an integral part of any motivational programme for rural development.

ii. The prerequisites to the use of folk media are an understanding of the rural audiences and the use of these media to provide the rural population with recreation, to attract their attention, and to ensure sufficient motivation for their participation in developmental activities.

iii. Folk media productions should be consistent with the needs of the social environment and related to the customs and believes of the local communities.

These are also a reflection of Mukhopadhyay's (2007) prerequisites to the use of folk media which include: 1) an

understanding of the rural audience; and 2) the use of these media to provide rural people with entertainment in order to attract their attention and to ensure their participation in developmental activities.

Folk media are, however, fraught with a serious disadvantage; its reach is limited at a time. Folk media performance is done for a smaller group of people and in specific area unlike the mass media that often have very wide reach.
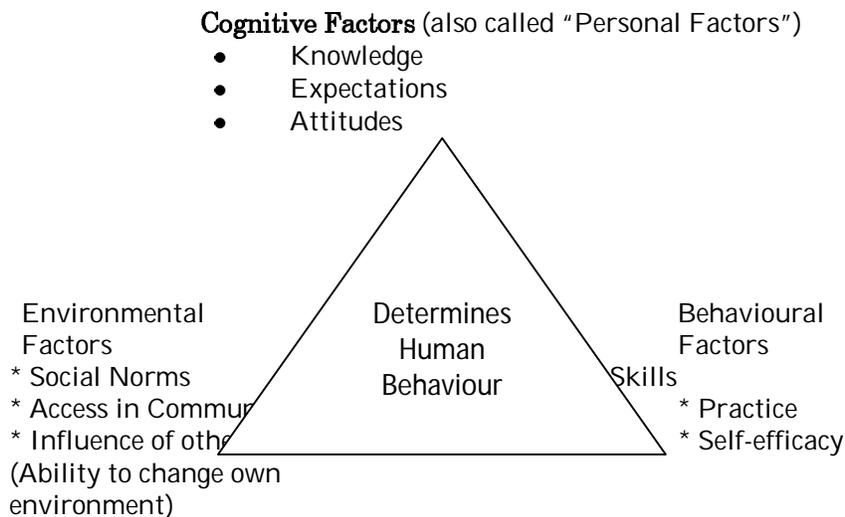
Theoretical Underpinning

This paper is anchored on social learning and communication and innovation theories.

a. Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning theory is one of the most influential learning theories propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977/1994 (Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso, 2008). The theory states that behaviour is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning. This implies that people learn from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling. Often called a bridge between the behaviourist and cognitive learning because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation, the theory explains that vicarious learning from others is a powerful teacher of attitudes and behaviour (Panford et al, 2001).

In the words of its main architect, Albert Bandura, "Social learning theory approaches the explanation of human behaviour in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental determinants" (Bandura, 1977). Thus, Bandura believes that individuals learn not only in classrooms but also by observing role models in everyday life, including characters in movies and TV programmes (Bandura, 1986). The three-way reciprocal relationship is graphically presented below:

Cognitive Factors (also called "Personal Factors")
- Knowledge
- Expectations
- Attitudes

Environmental Factors
* Social Norms
* Access in Commu
* Influence of oth
(Ability to change own environment)

Determines Human Behaviour

Behavioural Factors
Skills
* Practice
* Self-efficacy

Source: Resource Centre for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention (ReCAPP) (2013)

As noted by ReCAPP (2013) in applying social learning theory, the learner is encouraged to,

- observe and imitate the behaviours of others.

- See positive behaviours modeled and practiced

- Increase their own capability and confidence to implement new skills,

- Gain positive attitudes about implementing new skills, and

- Experience support from their environment in order to use their new skills

This theory has a lot of things in common with the study at hand. Folk media performers are role models, from whom people particularly the young learn. The various types of folk media are used as primers that provide the basis for residents of rural communities to discuss and dialogue their socio cultural and health situations and that enable them to take steps to find solutions to those problems (Panford et at, 2001).

b. Innovation – Diffusion Theory

This theory developed by Everett Rogers in 1960 (Anaeto et al, 2008) originated in communication to explain how, overtime, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (spreads) through a specific population or social system. The end result of this diffusion is that people, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behaviour, or product. Adoption implies that people do something differently than what they do previously (i.e. purchase or use a new product, acquire and perform a new behaviour, etc.). The theory argues that diffusion is only possible if the person perceives the idea, behaviour or product as new or innovative.

McQuail (2005, p. 470) posits that "diffusion of innovation follows four stages namely: information, persuasion, decision or adoption, and confirmation" (as cited in Edegoh, Okpara and Samson, 2014). Innovation or adoption of new idea, behaviour or product in a social system does not occur simultaneously, it is a process whereby some people are more apt to adopt the innovation than others. Thus, five established adopter categories have been specified by Rogers (1995, pp. 263 – 266). These include:

1. Innovators – These are people who want to be the first to try the innovation. These people are interested in new ideas, willing to take risks and are usually the first to develop new ideas, and very little or no effort is needed to convince them.

2. Early adopters – These are opinion leaders who enjoy leadership roles and embrace change opportunities. They do not need information to convince them to change.

3. Early majority - These people are not leaders but they adopt new ideas before the average person. This people need to see how the innovation works to adopt it. Provision of success stories and evidence of the innovation's effectiveness could be used to convince this category of people.

4. Late majority – In this category are skeptical individuals who would not adopt an innovation even when it has been tried by the majority. Adequate provision of information on how many

other people have successfully tried and adopted the innovation is needed to convince this category of people.

5. Laggards – Bound by tradition and extremely conservative, this category of people are very skeptical and are the hardest

6.

group to be convinced. To convince this group one has to use statistical evidence (facts and figures), fear appeals, and pressure from people, particularly their friends and peers, in the other adopter groups.
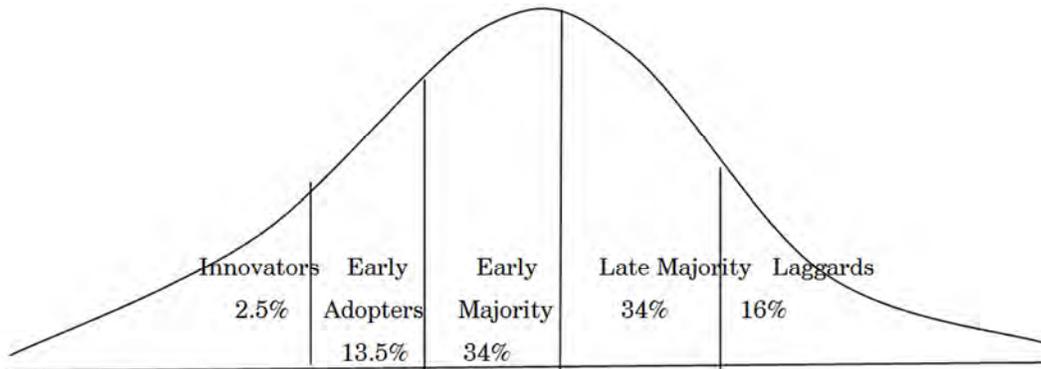
Source: Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation categories

As noted by the Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH) (2013), adoption of an innovation is influenced by five main factors, namely:

1. Relative Advantage – The degree to which an innovation is viewed as better than the idea, programme, or product it replaces.

2. Compatibility – How consistent the innovation is with the values, experiences and needs of the potential adopters.

3. Complexity – How difficult the innovation is with the values, experiences, and needs of potential adopters.

4. Triability –The extent to which the innovation can be tested or

experimented with before a commitment to adopt is made.

5. Observability – The extent to which the innovation provides tangible results.

The diffusion of innovation theory has disadvantages of not fostering participatory approach to adoption of a public health programme, and working better with adoption of behaviours rather than cessation or prevention of behaviours. These lapses notwithstanding the theory is adequate in explaining how an innovation (such as HIV/AIDS prevention programme) could be sustained within communities or group of people after it has been adopted by the leadership of the community or group (Roggers, 1995).

Types or Categories of Folk Media/Empirical Review

According to Jinadasa (2011, pp. 4-5), the traditional folk media could be categorised into:

1. Chattering, gossips, riddles, proverbs;

2. Folk lyrics and songs and singing styles;

3. Folk drama, skits and role plays;

4. Storytelling, folk tales, riddles, idioms;

5. Drumming and folk-music;

6. Mask dance and puppet dance;

7. Folk dances;

8. Ceremonial occasions; and

9. Rites and rituals.

Panford et al (2001) identify the types of folk media to include storytelling, puppetry, proverbs, visual arts, drama, role play, concerts, gong beating, dirges, songs, drumming, and dancing. KKHSON (2011) points out that folk media are a "total art created by the fusion of elements from music, dance, pantomime, versification, epic ballad recitation, religion and festival peasantry. The source also asserts the folk media absorb ceremonials, rituals, beliefs and the social system. The source further identifies style of speech, music, dance, dress and wisdom as part of folk media; which contain a rich store of mythological heroes, medieval romances, chivalric tales, social customs, beliefs and legends.

From the foregoing, it is evident that folk media encompass the totality of the life of community folks; they are rooted in the culture of the people and are used for the overall benefit of mankind in places where they are used.

Dauda (2009) examined "Problems and prospects of folk media usage for agricultural extension service delivery in Benue State, Nigeria", in which he surveyed 100 respondents using a simple random sampling technique and analysed data using the percentage method, frequency and mean. The objectives of Dauda's study were to ascertain the types of folk media used by the respondents, the most frequently used folk media and the most frequently mentioned problems associated with folk media use.

Finding of Dauda (2009) indicated that the types of folk media were town crier, folk dance, folk songs, folk puppet theatre, drama, friends/association and groups/associations. The researcher also reported that the types of folk media in order of usefulness as mentioned by respondents were Folk songs (87%), Friends/Relations (77%), Folk dances (75%), Town crier (68%), Groups/Association (52%), Folk puppet theatre (37%), and Drama (21%). He further reported that the major problems associated with the use of folk media among the farmers investigated include lack of fidelity (74%), costly to organise (60%), poor clarity (24%), limited coverage (18%), time convenience (13%), traditional restriction (55%), poor feedback (33%).

Folk Media and HIV/AIDS Prevention

Folk media could be used to foster the much needed attitude change which is necessary in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Rooted in the culture of the people, accepted by all rural folks and used in every day communal living typical

of rural communities, the folk media when properly used could prevent certain high risk sexual behaviours that aid the spread of HIV/AIDS and other risky culture-based attitudes. The efficacy of the folk media in this direction has been well documented. Apart from evidence from Miguel Sabido of Mexico who showed in the mid-1970s that soap operas with social messages could promote behaviour change, particularly soap operas that originate from drama-a folk medium, Panford et al (2001) have shown that using the Modeling and Reinforcement to Combat HIV (MARCH), an approach that modified the Sabido method and that is rooted in entertainment and education, that responsible social behaviour could be encouraged and this approach has been used in Mexico, the Philippines, Ghana and Nigeria. HIV prevention programme rooted in folk media forms such as music and dance or drama could be used for this purpose. Further, KKHSOU (2011) has noted the importance of folk media in development communication pointing out that the media could be used in conveying important or crucial development messages. Theuri (2004) maintains that folk media, when used to disseminate development messages within the context of entertainment and community get together is more successful than the mass media. It is more effective in that it uses a familiar medium and local language, passes relevant messages, addresses local issues, needs and problems, uses local talent, artists and available resources, is cheaper than print, projected or electronic media and exploits local creativity and enthusiasm. The point that is being made here is that the folk media are more suited to be used in tackling HIV/AIDS pandemic, not only because they are close to the heart of the

people and are therefore their primary sources of information (Alaket, 2015; Panford et al, 2001; KKHSOU, 2011) but also because the folk media are believed and trusted by the people, and the messages they convey are seen as credible, authentic and reliable by the rural folks at all times. These features and many more make the folk media enviable communication forms that could be harnessed to tackle any social problem or course such as the endemic HIV/AIDS.

Folk Media and Radio

Among the modern mass media of communication - newspaper, magazine, television, internet, radio, etc., the radio is best suited to be combined with the folk media for greater positive effect in the control of HIV/AIDS scourge. The reason for this is not far-fetched. As noted by Edegoh (2015), the radio with its ubiquitous presence, warmth, portability, power adaptability and most importantly, the capacity to break barriers of illiteracy and language, has the potency to penetrate into remote villages with clear signals. Radio therefore, is the most effective, spontaneous and available means of mass communication and an electronic information carrier. Konkwo (2010, p. 174) is more apt in his summary of the qualities or characteristics of radio:

The relative prominence of the radio as the most effective medium of mass communication with ruralites has been attributed to a number of factors, namely: (a) its capacity to transcend the functional barriers of illiteracy, illiteracy being a contentious issue in developing societies, including Nigeria with an estimated illiteracy rate of 60%; (b) in such a society radio has become a medium for all and sundry enjoying tremendous popularity among the

populace; (c) being relatively cheap and available, radio has become the medium of choice for all farmers, market women, artisans, fishermen, cooks, etc., since it is portable and practical; (d) its quality makes it suitable for use while engaging in or performing other tasks, such as driving, writing, eating, etc. In view of these qualities or characteristics, communication experts and development organisations have, over the past 50 years, recommended radio as the most appropriate medium through which the rural people globally, can be reached, sensitised and mobilised to embrace rural development in all its ramifications.

Thus, radio could be used as purveyor of HIV/AIDS messages based of its characteristic features and advantages to complement (or augment) the folk media. The combination of these two media forms could go a long way in making available the much needed HIV/AIDS risk-free or safe information to people in rural communities of Africa and the Third World, in their preferred language (or languages) at a time such information is required.

Conclusion

The epidemic (HIV/AIDS) is still threatening many countries of the world particularly, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The pandemic is still a major health problem (if not the most) in Nigeria. Most of the approaches to the prevention of infection and spread of the disease which are rooted in Western mass media of communication have proved to be ineffective. An alternative approach - the use of folk media - is considered a better means of contending with and containing the scourge. This is because folk media is culture-based, close to the

heart of the people and are viewed as credible by the people. Folk media is therefore, viewed as the most effective channel of tackling health-related problems including HIV/AIDS prevention and control, particularly in the many rural communities of the Third World, Africa and specifically, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of the study, we make the following recommendations.

1. Adoption of cultural-based media campaign approach: Efforts should be made by the relevant government agencies and other non-governmental organisations involved in campaigns on HIV/AIDS to adopt and use traditional folk media forms which are based on the culture of the people in the fight against HIV/AIDS infection and spread in the society.

2. Messages on HIV prevention should be designed to be disseminated through the traditional folk media channels with the aim of educating the people on HIV/AIDS high risk behaviour and dissuading them from undertaking such actions.

3. There is also the need to design HIV control or prevention messages in local languages of the people, as language is said to be the cement of culture. People will pay more attention to such messages.

4. Radio should be used to complement or augment folk media in the effort to control the disease in rural communities of

the Third World countries. A combination of radio with folk media will produce more desirable impact in the ongoing war against HIV/AIDS.

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