19. Case Study

Development Journalism in Action: the Makgabaneng Radio Drama

Botswana has the unenviable record of being a country with the second highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection in the world, surpassed only by Swaziland. The first cases in Botswana were diagnosed in 1985, and by 2003 the national prevalence rate had reached 37.4%.

Because AIDS is such a serious problem for Botswana, a great deal of financial and other critical public and private resources are needed to deal with it. This has had the consequence of diverting resources that are desperately needed to fight unemployment, poverty and other social ills. HIV/AIDS has also reversed some of the commendable socio-economic strides Botswana made from being a poor country (in 1966, it still relied on its former British colonial master for more than 90% of its budget revenue), to the middle-income country that it is today.

Meanwhile, a recent major HIV and AIDS and Gender Baseline Study, carried out as part of the Media Action Plan on HIV and AIDS (MAP) led by the Southern African Editors’ Forum (SAEF), found that the coverage of HIV/AIDS in the media in Botswana and the rest of the region is extremely low. It also found that HIV/AIDS still does not get mainstream coverage. The study concluded that the voices of people with HIV/AIDS are hardly heard in the media.

Botswana has implemented a variety of HIV prevention, treatment and care initiatives. Programmes to support safe behaviours and promote behavioural changes, such as abstinence, condom use, HIV testing and uses of other health services, are part of the national strategy to fight HIV/AIDS.

In addition, Botswana’s state and private media have increasingly viewed some of the most effective behavioural, communication and awareness-building avenues the country could use as part of the national strategy to fight HIV/AIDS. This conclusion was arrived at after it was realised that even with all the information on HIV/AIDS, high-risk behaviour had not reduced in many countries, such as Botswana; and that while early efforts at HIV prevention focused on giving people correct information, there was a high rate of new infections, which showed that giving people information alone, while necessary, is not enough. On the other hand, evaluations have shown that entertainment-education strategies that focus on a range of cognitive, emotional and other factors that influence behavioural change are popular and effective.
Therefore, dealing with AIDS in Botswana in the past few years has included the use of “entertainment-education” programmes through the Botswana national broadcast media to promote HIV-related behavioural changes.

One such programme is *Makgabaneng*, an entertainment-education radio drama series broadcast in Setswana. It is written, produced and acted by Batswana and is designed to support the nation’s HIV prevention and mitigation goals, by raising HIV/AIDS related issues relevant to the lives of contemporary Batswana. Since August 2001, it has been airing twice-weekly on Radio Botswana, which reaches 80% of Botswana’s population. It is broadcast on the Radio Botswana Channel 1 on Mondays and Wednesdays and repeated on Radio Botswana Channel 2 on Thursdays and Saturdays.

*Makgabaneng* is funded through a collaboration between the government of Botswana and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This partnership established the Botswana/USA (or BOTUSA) Project to mount various programmes and activities to fight HIV/AIDS and related infectious diseases in the country. The BOTUSA Project is also collaborating with Total Community Mobilisation (TCM) to help reinforce the ideas and stories presented in the drama series at community level.

TCM is a Botswana-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) that uses door-to-door peer education and community mobilisation techniques for the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the promotion of HIV/AIDS-related services. Trained TCM field officers convene listeners in several communities in Botswana to listen to the radio drama and discuss the issues raised.

This modelling (role models acting in the radio drama, some of whom are struggling to adopt HIV-safe behaviours) and reinforcement programme to combat HIV/AIDS combines the *Makgabaneng* radio drama series with community-based reinforcement activities to encourage safer HIV-related behaviours (such as delaying initiation of sex, being faithful, accessing services and providing support to people living with HIV/AIDS) among Batswana aged 15 to 49.

To assess the popularity, coverage and impact of the programme in Botswana, *Makgabaneng* producers conducted a cross-sectional survey of listeners. The survey revealed that the radio drama was extremely popular and that most of the listeners thought it was both entertaining and informative. It also achieved the important objectives of reaching and sustaining listenership among large and important segments of the population (for example, the youth). The programme appears to be associated with higher levels of HIV/AIDS knowledge in key areas and with less stigmatising attitudes toward those affected by HIV/AIDS. It was also found to be associated with some key preventive behaviours, including increased intention to get tested for HIV, more discussion with partners about HIV testing, and getting tested during pregnancy.

During an interview, Maungo Mooki, the programme’s Managing Editor, revealed that *Makgabaneng* has been so successful and effective that it has attracted a lot of regional and international attention (M. Mooki, personal communication, 29 May, 2006). It has caught the attention of other countries in Africa and the Caribbean in particular. She said that plans were afoot to roll out a similar programme in Zimbabwe, Ghana, Ethiopia, Zambia and Malawi. The Caribbean would be reached through rolling it out in Guyana in the next few weeks.
Bibliography for the Case Study


MISA & Gender Links (2003) *Women and men make the news – Gender and media baseline study, Southern African regional overview.* Johannesburg: MISA and Gender Links


Individuals consulted during the research

- M. Mooki, Managing Editor, Radio Botswana