

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **The role of broadcast media in behaviour change and HIV/AIDS communication to the youth: A focus on Kenya's music industry**

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**HIV/AIDS is the greatest challenge that has faced the African continent in recent decades. The absence of a cure or vaccine for HIV/AIDS and the urgent need to reach people on the impact of this disease has resulted in the emphasis of mass education of populations, which incorporates the use of mass media. Education about HIV/AIDS has gone beyond awareness building to attitude and behaviour change. This paper focuses on how HIV/AIDS awareness and education is carried out by the music industry in Kenya's broadcast media. The paper introduces the rationale of HIV/AIDS prevalence among the Kenyan youth. It examines the place of Kenya's music in behaviour change communication by digging into the language and graphics that are encompassed in this music. The paper notes that despite the fact that the media has made efforts to create awareness and advocate for behaviour change, the same media is perpetuating sexual graphics that seem to promote sexual behaviour among the youth. The paper gives recommendations concerning the way HIV/AIDS and behaviour change communication should be carried out by Kenya's broadcast media, with the hope that these incorporations will help save young lives from HIV/AIDS scourge.**

**Key words:** Kenya, media, HIV/AIDS, music, behaviour change.

## **INTRODUCTION**

HIV/AIDS pandemic has become the greatest challenge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One of the most severe consequences of the disease is the loss of young adults in their most productive years. High level of teenage pregnancy, abortions, school dropouts and sexually transmitted infections confirm that youths are engaged in early sexual activities that are increasingly predisposed to HIV/AIDS. The high rate of infection among the youth depicts a situation whereby, either the youth have not received sufficient information regarding the dangers associated with the disease, or they have ignored the message. In Kenya, HIV/AIDS communication has tried to focus on methods that will motivate individuals to change their attitudes and behaviour. One of the methods that has been adversely utilized is the use of media, both printed and electronic. This is largely because the media is a powerful source of sexual information for adolescents,

affecting their beliefs and behaviour as well, especially in a society that is closed up on sexual matters (Steel, 1999). Furthermore, adolescents do look to media guidance on where they fit in the world (Steel, 1999)

This paper examines the role that the television and radio as broadcast media play in communicating the message of HIV/AIDS and subsequent behaviour change to the youth. The paper notes that the youth have been adversely affected by the HIV/AIDS scourge. Equally deadly is the fact that majority of the young people have the knowledge about the way the disease is transmitted and are also aware of the risk they face as the young people, but their knowledge is not reflected in their sexual practices. The paper digs into the language and graphics that are used by broadcast media to create awareness on HIV/AIDS and to sensitize them on ways of taking control measures. Lastly, recommendations are given on how

**Table 1.** Estimated percentage number of 15 - 24 year old men and women living with HIV/AIDS in eastern Africa, 2001.

Country	%		000's	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Ethiopia	5.7 - 10.0	3.2 - 5.6	354 - 622	199 - 348
Kenya	12.5 - 18.7	4.8 - 7.2	448 - 671	172 - 258
Tanzania	6.4 - 9.7	2.8 - 4.3	239 - 362	104 - 160
Uganda	3.7 - 5.6	1.6 - 2.4	90 - 136	39 - 58
Rwanda	9.0 - 13.4	3.9 - 5.9	78 - 116	33 - 51

Source: UNAIDS, 2002.

the media, using the music industry, can succeed in having the youth change their sexual attitude.

### HIV/AIDS PREVALENCE AMONG YOUTH IN KENYA

Kenya is one of the most affected countries in East Africa by HIV/AIDS (Table 1). The face of this pandemic in the country is primarily young, with the majority of victims aged 15 to 24. Young people are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because their social, emotional and psychological development is incomplete. They are in a period of transition, in which they are no longer children, but not yet adults. At this period, their needs are usually conflicting and confused. They therefore tend to experiment with risky behaviour, often with little awareness of the danger involved, or lacking the judgment that comes with experience. In fact, risky sex is often part of a larger adolescent behaviour.

### KENYAN MUSIC AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION

Communication has a big role to play in efforts to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS menace. It has the potential to provide information, knowledge, attitude and skills that will inform and lead to positive moral behaviour. In Kenya, broadcast media (radio and television) have been used extensively to educate the masses about HIV and AIDS. Specifically, the local music industry has been used to sensitize the youth about the need for behaviour change. This is largely because music is perceived as very important in shaping the youth's identity and defining important social and sub-cultural boundaries (Christenson, 1990). Music greatly influences how young people view themselves and others, and how they act out of these views. In fact, it furnishes much of their slang, dominates their conversations, and provides the ambience at their social gatherings (O'Toole, 1997). Kenya's music industry has achieved this by composing songs that encourage abstinence, and the use of music celebrities in promoting the use of contraceptives.

Songs that have been composed to help curb the AIDS menace include "Juala", popularly known as "Manyakee", "Vuta Pumzi", "Under 18" among others. In "Juala", the artist challenges the youth to use condoms (juala) during sexual encounters. In a language laden with sheng, he ridicules African men and dismisses them as sexual addicts. He says, African men wako obsessed, possessed, depressed "na Manyakee" (African men are obsessed and possessed by women's bottoms). And because of their nature, he challenges them to use condoms. "Manze tumia" protection to avoid this infection. Failure to use condoms, the African man according to the artist will end up in the mortuary, looking stupid. Do you have some "juala"? he poses a question; "Ama tukucheki ukining'inia mortuary kama fala" (or you will lie in the mortuary like a fool). He continues to compare the life of a human being with the price of a condom and concludes that the later is too cheap. He says, "Juala ni hashu tu na bado mnacheza na maisha mandugu" (Fellows, condoms are only ten Kenyan shillings and you are still playing around with life).

The message is the same in "Vuta Pumzi". Here, the artist pleads with the youth to listen to him. He says, "Nisikilizeni, jameni nisikilizeni" (Please listen to me). The message that he has to the youth is; even if one appears healthy, the person may be infected. "Usimwone amejaza mwili ukadhani ni mpoa". Similarly, he ridicules lusty men and makes fun of them. "Akiona kifua kinapita, huyooo .... Tako lisipite tu mate yashamtoka, kila shimo unaona unadunga" (when they see a girl passing by, they salivate). Just like his counterpart in "Juala", the artist predicts death for individuals who do not take precaution on issues of sex. He says, "utakufa tukuzike Lang'ata" (you will die and we shall bury you at the cemetery).

In 'Under 18', a young man narrates his ordeal under the judge, policemen and his peers because of going out with a girl who happens to be a minor. He panics after realizing the girl is a minor and pleads innocent about knowing the girl's age. He says, "kumbe ni under 18, sijui nifanye je, nitaambia aje judge"?

Such is the nature of songs that promote sexual morality in Kenya. By the virtue that behaviour change communication needs to address issues of sex, which

society is not comfortable with, Kenyan artists have devised the use of sheng to speak freely about sex without causing embarrassment to the listeners.

There is a general realization that the interest of the Kenyan youth towards music goes beyond just entertainment. Many youngsters look up to the musicians as their role models. According to Bandura (1971), messages in media may be particularly powerful (to the youth) when the participants are attractive, are shown as powerful, are rewarded in some way for their actions, or represent characters with whom the young person identifies. Music celebrities, therefore, have been used by broadcast media to promote safe sex in Kenya. Phrases like "Nameless ana yake je una yako? Deux vultures wana zao je una yako?" and "Kleptomaniacs wana zao je una yako?" are common.

### **KENYAN MUSIC AND ATTITUDE CHANGE AMONG THE YOUTH**

In spite of the efforts of the music industry in Kenya, the attitude of the youth towards abstinence and sexual morality continues to decline. In his study on five selected Eastern African countries, Bankole (2004) notes that an average of 90% of youths have heard about HIV/AIDS and know ways of avoiding it. But a high percentage does not approve of abstinence, neither does it use condoms during sexual encounters.

In fact, majority of the youths have multiple sexual partners. Wango (2001) is of the feeling that all is not well in the way this awareness has been handled in Kenya. This is because the number of youths dying from HIV/AIDS has continued to increase day by day, compared to other Eastern African countries. Obel (1995) contends that the media has created awareness about HIV/AIDS, and that the youths are aware about the pandemic, but their attitudes and behaviour do not reflect this awareness.

He says: In spite of numerous campaigns to spread the word about HIV and AIDS Virus, many people in Kenya are not bothered about the consequences of being exposed to the virus. Government publicity networks continue to show pictures of AIDS victims on national television programmes and in the pages of local newspapers 80% of people are aware of the AIDS problems, but their attitudes do not reflect this awareness. They lack in-depth communication.

The existence of high awareness levels of HIV/AIDS in the absence of behaviour change indicates that effective communication approaches and strategies have not been developed and applied. Is Kenya's music industry to blame for declined morality? How is the message regarding safe sex passed across? There is a need to look again at the way behaviour change communication is passed to the youth, through language and graphics in Kenya's music industry.

## **LANGUAGE AND GRAPHICS IN KENYAN MUSIC**

### **Language**

Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) is of the opinion that language is very important in any communication policy. Through language, he says, people not only describe the world but also understand themselves. In essence, it forms a specific form and character of an individual.

The predominant language used by musicians in Kenya's music is "sheng". The use of "sheng" in music is aimed at constructing a certain audience. In my opinion, this is a deliberate effort to close out an older generation from certain issues, in this case, issues of sex. The language used in these songs is vulgar and has explicit sexual hints. To say the least, the language is 'gross' and 'disgusting'. Sexual references are direct with no room for interpretation and ambiguity.

The songs depict sex as an activity, which is acceptable, and without negative consequences. In fact, they tend to set a standard about relationships, creating an impression of "everybody is doing it". Young people who are unable to live to that standard may feel inadequate. In the song "Huku Nairobi" the artist says, "huku Nairobi we like to party, huku Nairobi tunapenda kuwaka, huku Nairobi tunapenda kuhanya" (In Nairobi, we like partying, drinking beer and having multiple sexual partners). This is a standard set for Nairobi dwellers. Anybody who does not live to these standards may feel out of place. Virginity is depicted negatively, like something to be ashamed of. In "Eee Dejay" the artist plays around with the psyche of the male listeners by challenging their ego. The lyric goes: "Eee Dejay weka ngoma, tumecome kukatika mpaka chee. Enyi wasee msisleki, kuna bale na mamanzi..", which literally translates to (Hey Dejay put the music on! we have come to dance till dawn. You men don't just sit there! There is plenty of beer and women).

Kenyan songs portray a skewed relationship between clear messages about safe sex and sex for sex sake. A critical look at the language in these songs leaves a thin line between the two aspects. In "Juala" for example, despite the fact that the artist is promoting the use of contraceptives, he is, on the other hand encouraging casual sex. He terms the bottoms of females as coming in all sizes and all prices. He says, Manyakee all sizes, Manyakee all prices... juala ndio wahitaji. The artist commercializes sex and gives an okay to casual sex as long as the individuals involved have a condom. Other songs like "Wee Kamu", "Kamata Dame", "John Nampenda John" among others primarily describe sex. In the song "Wee Kamu", the artist uses graphic language and glorifies promiscuity. The song delves into bedroom matters, describing a sexual encounter and leaves nothing to the imagination of its listeners (Chapin, 2000). It is heavily done in "sheng", which masks most of the profane language used in it. To many young listeners,

however, the graphics are as alive as the song's beats.

### **Graphics**

Majority of Kenyan music is laden with staggering sexual graphics. Most songs include innuendo, partial nudity and sexual situations and behaviour. These media channels depict half-dressed women in sexually suggestive body movements and often play lyrics intended to inflame sexual feelings. The images and words in the media contain unrealistic, inaccurate and misleading information that young people accept as fact (O'Toole, 1997). Research shows that increased exposure to unrealistic portrayal of sex is associated with increased perception of sexual activity in the real world (O'Toole, 1997).

Music programmes use fast-paced visuals to grab the attention of a very specific youthful audience - a generation that has been raised with different ways of processing information (Gakahu, 2005). They use sexual images of women through short, sharp, shots of intense visual pleasure, to encourage viewers to watch closely and stay focused so that they do not miss out anything.

### **MUSICIANS AS PROMOTERS OF RESPONSIBLE SEX**

In social learning theory (Bandura, 1971), young people can learn about sexuality from others depicted in the media. With this in mind, the broadcast media in Kenya has utilized the use of musicians to advertise the use of contraceptives. What the media fails to do is to remind the youth that these celebrities are mature enough to make proper sex decisions and are probably married (Gakahu, 2005) Young people listen to adverts, but they do not learn about the contexts in which the behaviour depicted occurs.

### **DISCUSSION ON POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF LOCAL MUSIC TO YOUTH SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR**

According to Albert Bandura's cross-species and cultural studies, human sexuality is governed primarily by social conditioning, rather than endocrinal stimulation (Chapin, 2000). The cultivation theorists say that media's consistent images and portrayals construct a specific portrait of reality. Gradually, viewers come to cultivate or adopt attitudes and expectations about the world that coincides with this portrait. In this regard, profane lyrics have an impact on youth's sexual attitude. In a country where parents and schools remain reluctant to discuss sexual topics, the youth look to the media to find out about the world, in their own language and from their own point of view. They generally accept what they see on the media as real because they have nothing to tell them otherwise. Garner et al. (1998) underscores this observation by stressing that young people are most

dependent on the media as a source of information when they lack personal experience and interpersonal advice in the area they are seeking knowledge.

The songs in our music industry form a mindset that is later put into action when an opportunity arises. This is in consonant with the theory of modelling, which states that individuals perceive a form of behaviour portrayed by a mass media character. They find this behaviour attractive for imitation in some personal situation. The perceived behaviour is reproduced by individuals when situation arises. Entertainment content depicting sexual norms, stereotypes, double standards and sexual roles may have profound influence on teens' perception about sex, body image and social norms (Ward, 1995). Teens who watch sexual content on the media are more likely to engage in sex and tend to have negative attitudes about being a virgin (Ward, 1995).

Although exposure to sexual content may not be guarantee that viewers will take irresponsible steps in their own lives, this exposure may help shape viewers' attitudes and expectations about sexual relationships. The United States, for example, has a higher rate of teen pregnancy than any other industrialized country in the world.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Kenya's broadcast media, through the music industry, gives a distorted outlook to sexual behaviour. Behaviour change communication in Kenya has been blurred by the language, content and graphics used in music. The media makes sex appear better than it actually is. Furthermore, it does not provide adequate information on how sex can be dangerous or how to have a healthy sexual relationship. Songs in these media easily contribute to an overdrive in sexual passion among the youth. In essence, the intended message is completely diluted, and the youths are seemingly being encouraged to venture into casual sex.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

With regard to the discussion presented above, this paper recommends the following:

- i.) Communication strategies that focus on the youth must be innovative, creative and comprehensive. They must address both individual behaviour that places young people at risk and the variety of contributions that contribute to risky behaviour.
- ii.) It is important for Kenyan musicians to choose the words carefully because every word they say in their songs affect the listeners in one way or another. On the same note, media houses should put censorship on the type of songs they air, bearing in mind that they have a

role of agenda setting in society.

iii.) Parents should assist their children to become 'media literate' by discussing what is featured by broadcast media so that they can differentiate reality and fiction. This will go a long way to prevent the youth from becoming passive victims of media content.

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