

ACHIEVEMENTS WITH MEDIA TO CREATE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR KP INTERVENTIONS IN TOGO AND BURKINA FASO

"The sole aim of journalism should be service" -- Mahatma Gandhi

I. Importance of creating media alliances

The HIV/AIDS prevention and care project in West Africa (PACTE-VIH) places central emphasis on raising awareness in the media, including editors and journalists. Focus is on the daily challenges of stigma, discrimination and violence faced by key populations (KP) targeted by the project: men who have sex with men (MSM), and female sex workers (FSW).

PACTE-VIH started a planned process of creating alliances between the media and HIV responders, including KP, after needs assessment by Africa Consultants International (ACI). Findings showed that the irregular, non-analytic, insensitive and sensational nature of media coverage favored flare-up of social crises.

Importantly, it found that media coverage was inappropriate mainly because journalists were handicapped by insufficient training; weaknesses in the objectivity and rigor needed to analyze KP-related issues; poor resources to conduct investigations, and

difficulties in accessing credible sources.

Alliances with media were conceived as responses that could be sustained over time to improve media coverage characterized by stigmatization and discrimination against MSM and FSW. Interventions with media were necessary because its analysis and reporting usually mirrored the marginalization and rejection of KP because of socio-cultural, moral and religious considerations. Media accounts rarely departed from the stigmatization prevalent in society.

Web searches of media reports in Burkina Faso and Togo show that reporters usually report inflammatory statements by critics of KP without providing balance, thus exacerbating stigma and prejudice. It is important to always note the connections to HIV prevention and the human right to health when reporting on critics. Below are extracts from some media reports:



- "Prostitution, pornography, homosexuality, pedophilia... the list is not exhaustive. Traditional African values are turning into a garbage bin of culture containing all kinds of ideas abhorred by morality and sometimes coming from abroad."



- "Homosexuality should be entirely and categorically banned in our society and the government should take the necessary prohibitive measures."



• “He (a local critic) is fiercely opposed to homosexuals and thinks they are sick persons who demand rights but should be shot in the central square.”



• “Homosexuals are detested by the Togolese, according to a research group. Comparisons of differences of religion, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation and persons living with HIV show that nine out of 10 Togolese loathe cohabiting with homosexuals.”



• “Feminine homosexuality is increasing. It is no longer practiced covertly. Some practice it because of desires and others for money. It is difficult to separate a lesbian from a heterosexual. They are elegant, charming and so attractive that men desire them.”

II. The PACTE-VIH approaches

The PACTE-VIH goal is to continuously reinforce government efforts in Togo, Burkina Faso and other West African countries for HIV prevention and reducing stigma and violence against KP. Tools include strategic interventions to create an enabling environment for support programs that are evidence-based, adaptable, replicable and transferrable throughout the region.

A core element of PACTE-VIH's work is to bring

together FHI 360 partners in joint activities that encourage leadership by the KP themselves to raise media awareness of their daily experience of insecurity, suffering and violation of human rights. The overall results have been positive in Togo and Burkina Faso.

There are several elements in the PACTE-VIH approach to media alliances that improve efficacy.

• KP are invited to meetings with journalists so that they receive credible and authentic briefings from the original source on the needless suffering experienced by MSM and FSW. Often journalists have never met MSM earlier in a person-to-person situation.

• Regular media forums (“Forum des acteurs médiatiques”) have been created. They are among outcomes of PACTE-VIH capacity-building and information sharing workshops for media and were developed by the participants wishing to remain at the forefront of knowledge on KP issues and HIV prevention.

• So far, about 83 reporters, broadcasters, editors, media owners have been trained in media workshops (57 in Togo and 26 in Burkina Faso). They represent 72 different media organizations (49 in Togo and 23 in Burkina Faso). The media are from rural and urban radio, television, press agencies, newspapers, magazines, internet news and blogs. Most journalists are expanding their knowledge and skills when they take part in regular meetings and media forums organized by PACTE-VIH in collaboration with the government.

The forums are vital tools sustaining and reinforcing media involvement in KP-related issues. They underpin alliances with the media and help to ensure longevity of initiatives in favor of PACTE-VIH and other efforts.

They also help to implement principles of professional ethics agreed by media leaders related to KP and HIV prevention.

III. Alliances with media professionals and support activities

Using innovative approaches, PACTE-VIH capitalized on its work in favor of KP and brought together journalists and editors in regular forums to share information and conduct capacity-building. Key focus was placed on:

- Creating alliances with the media, including reporters, editors and media owners;
- Furnishing accurate inputs about facts;
- Teaching the appropriate vocabulary for writing and speaking about KP and HIV prevention;
- Conducting media training, including analyses of KP experience of stigma and violence;
- Facilitating media exercises in handling those experiences in an accurate and humane manner;
- Motivating journalists, editors and media owners to respect professional ethics by promoting an end to stigma and violence against KP;
- Raising media awareness of efforts by government and other partners to respect the human rights of co-citizens who are also KP;
- Encouraging editors and owners to provide more resources and opportunities for reporters to go deeper

into knowledge acquired through PACTE-VIH capacity-building.

Desired results: The chief expectation is to engage media in providing well-informed and unbiased information sensitive to the human rights of KP. Purposes for engaging the media included:

- Helping to reduce fear and encouraging KP to use health services to prevent vulnerability to STI including HIV/AIDS.
- Capitalizing on the interventions of PACTE-VIH and its partners with media professionals to create and maintain a favorable environment in Togo and Burkina Faso for the protection of KP and prevention of HIV.
- Encourage personal contacts and hands-on involvement through in-person meetings, focus group discussions and trimestral forums for already trained journalists and other important media actors.
- Obtain involvement of associations of media owners, authorities and deciders in the audio-visual sector, regulators of media communication and self-regulating media bodies.

VI. Foundations for further gains

PACTE-VIH interventions conducted together with partners and KP leaders delivered gratifying results. They presaged further leveraging and capitalization of

resources and efforts put into the interventions. Positive outcomes included the following:

Meetings, workshops and forums sponsored by PACTE-VIH were well attended by senior media editors and journalists.

Creation of "Forum des acteurs médiatiques" which bring together senior media persons in forums to review, consolidate and expand their knowledge of KP and HIV prevention-related issues. They are

held every three months in Togo and six months in Burkina Faso.

Participants agreed on a Charter for Media Professionals in Togo, comprising 10 principles for better information about HIV prevention and comprehensive care of KP.

In Burkina Faso, participants concluded a five-point Declaration of Principles for media organizations.

The charter and declaration enshrined agreement that media information about response to the HIV

epidemic must respect the dignity and human rights of KP as underlined in the media's professional codes of ethics. Principles included important commitments like ensuring the usefulness of information, its truthfulness, balance and diversity.

Media comments

Significant gains were made in raising the awareness of journalists and involving editors and media owners in

support of PACTE-VIH efforts. Participants offered comments as below:



"Journalists in Togo are now more sensitive to the problems of KP. Their reporting is more focused on helping to eliminate stigma and discrimination. This is a precious gain because it is a foundation for improving outcomes continuously". -- Thibaut A. Adjibodin, Réseau des Médias Africains contre le SIDA, la tuberculose et paludisme (REMASTP). Togo. (Interview in November 2016 in Lomé)



"The PACTE-VIH intervention has helped me to understand the experiences of KP and to improve my sensitivity and the accuracy of my reporting on radio. It should be encouraged. The Charter is displayed visibly in our office and journalists follow the principles when they need to report on HIV and KP. It is a big improvement." -- Sweetie Lawson, Kanal Radio, Togo (Interview in November 2016 in Lomé)



"The media forums have enabled me to refine my language to more accurately portray issues affected MSM". -- Alice B. Radio Lomé, Togo (Interview in November 2016)



"We are happy to note that articles published in the media about us are less discriminatory than earlier." -- MSM in Togo (Interview in November 2016 in Lomé)



"We are here to help journalists to write and broadcast accurately, if they need us." -- Mathias Ayena, Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication (HAAC). (Interview in November 2016 in Togo)



"We help journalists to provide information on public health and encourage access to health services, which is the right of everyone in Togo and is guaranteed by our constitution." -- M. Gnasse Atinedi, expert on communication at CNLS, Togo (Interview in November 2016 in Lomé)



"Often people approach problems affecting KP with passion but without understanding how HIV affects so many aspects of life going beyond the infection. PACTE-VIH interventions with the media should be expanded and deepened because MSM are increasingly repudiated and rejected by society. Raising media awareness and capacity-building should be prolonged to improve more pragmatic understanding of sexual minorities and their human rights, including the right to health. I agree that providing health services does not in any way encourage homosexuality and it is important for HIV prevention. We should not sweep the issues of MSM under the carpet in Burkina Faso." -- Moussa Congo, journalist for SIDWAYA group, Burkina Faso.

V. Working together for evidence-based programs

PACTE-VIH emphasized working together and placed KP at the center of media interventions. The evidence signaled was revealing and included the following:

Signal 1: Putting focus on KP-related work

- Media professionals ranging from junior reporters to editors and owners are usually open-minded.
 - o They feel responsible to work for the benefit of society, including providing space for programs for HIV prevention and protection of KP, supported by the government, PACTE-VIH and other partners.
 - o They like to meet KP leaders because of the personal stories that help to make the media's work much more interesting.

Signal 2: Media professionals support the PACTE-VIH approach

- As professionals moving in many social circles, media persons have a strong sense that working

together is more effective than working in silos.

- o They appreciate the PACTE-VIH approach because it places KP leadership at the center of exercises to raise media awareness of stigma and violence.

Signal 3: Person-to-person events get results

- Willingness to actively take part in workshops and regular forums for media personalities demonstrates that journalists do understand the necessity of protecting the anonymity of KP and providing well-informed reports to prevent stigma. They also help to change the attitudes of media participants towards KP.
- Journalists are motivated to help reduce the fears and difficulties of KP but often feel handicapped by inadequate training and insufficient information.
- Improved sensitivity to KP problems has helped to reduce reporting that might be sensational and lack sufficient thought to impacts on society.



VI. The PACTE-VIH model for moving forward

Below are some steps of the strategy to multiply gains through coordination and partnerships with the media.

They are based on innovations used by PACTE-VIH and lessons learned so far.

Step 1:

Use PACTE-VIH leadership to integrate prevention of stigma and discrimination into the media activities of partners.

- Multiply media awareness workshops and forums where KP are also present.
- Invite senior journalists, editors, owners and regulators to participate (no more than 30).
- Use a leading and reputable journalist as facilitator.
- Encourage agreement on a Charter or Declaration of principles for the media after arranging meetings with KP leaders to familiarize participants with suffering stemming from stigma and discrimination.

Step 2:

Reinforce the capacity of journalists to obtain and understand information about KP issues and HIV prevention by approaching qualified sources.

- Organize training and capacity-building workshops for journalists.
- Ensure that KP, especially MSM, attend some sessions to brief media participants on their problems. This personal contact is essential for many journalists who may not have met a MSM in the usual course of their work. It adds authenticity and credibility to the necessity of ending stigma and violence against MSM and FSW.
- Get participants to publish information bulletins on KP issues as part of their capacity building exercises. This is very useful for hands-on training.

Step 3:

Hold regular forums for media professionals, KP and other partners.

- Hold regular workshops or forums with media, including KP representatives. PACTE-VIH uses a trimestral format for forums. They are essential for updating the knowledge of previous participants, bringing in new participants and building inter-personal networks.
- The example of the forums ("Forum des acteurs médiatiques") sponsored by PACTE-VIH is a good one to emulate. They enable networking among professionals and regular opportunities to consolidate and deepen the knowledge of media professionals on KP and HIV prevention-related issues.
- Regular and institutionalized forums also help to make media persons and KP become aware of useful new programs of government, PACTE-VIH and other partners. They also help to encourage more understanding and use of health services by KP and reduce the prejudices of those who might practice stigma and violence against them.

Step 4:

Involve senior media persons in formal or informal alliances with PACTE-VIH efforts.

- Participants at media workshops and the media-KP forums should be assisted with access to resources and accurate information through PACTE-VIH and its partners.
- Media participants who have completed capacity-building should be integrated into support networks for PACTE-VIH activities.

Step 5:

Encourage regular contacts with media reporters and editors to promote longevity of media support for PACTE-VIH and related programs against stigma and violence against KP.

- Priority should be given to integrating regular contacts, e.g. trimestral media-KP forums, in national strategies and programs.

Step 6:

Scaling up

- Increase media training workshops and forums to cover the whole of Togo and Burkina Faso.
- Train professors of journalism schools to include issues related to KP and HIV prevention in their courses.
- Encourage journalism schools to conduct practice assignments for students on these issues.

VII. Replication for the region

Evidence-based, adaptable, replicable and transferrable models have emerged successfully from the work of PACTE-VIH so far. The experience in Togo and Burkina Faso suggests that media alliances are welcomed by professionals and can produce positive impacts over time to reduce socio-cultural attitudes that motivate stigma and violence against KP. Providing

accurate and useful information through credible sources helps to prompt changes in those attitudes.

Mutually agreed codes of ethics for media professionals help to reinforce the enabling environment for interventions by PACTE-VIH and its partners, in conformity with government strategies.

Contact us

FHI360 Ghana Office
 2nd Floor, Marvel House 148A
 Giffard Road, Accra, Ghana
 P. O. Box CT 4033, Accra, Ghana

www.pactevih.org
jtchupo@fhi360.org

The HIV & AIDS prevention and care project in West Africa (PACTE-VIH) is a five-year cooperative agreement (2012-2017) between USAID/West Africa and FHI360.

This document was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States of International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of FHI360 and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.