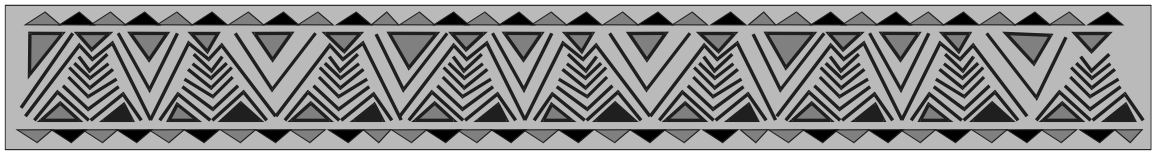

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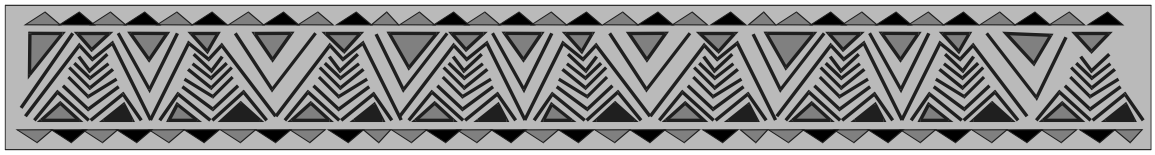


Introduction

UNAIDS and the World Health Organization estimate that by the end of the year 2001 nearly 40 million adults and children were living with HIV/AIDS worldwide and that 28.1 million of those people were living in Africa[1]. For women in Africa, the social, economic, and political impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is profound – 55 percent of adults with HIV/AIDS in Africa are women.

The media can play an important role in raising the public's awareness about HIV/AIDS by reporting stories that promote prevention of the virus and reduce the stigma associated with those suffering from it. Journalists who understand the public policy implications and the medical facts of HIV/AIDS and who are aware of the myths surrounding the disease will produce better stories. These stories will hold governments and communities accountable for their programs, educate the public about prevention, offer methods for coping with the disease, and discredit stereotypes surrounding HIV/AIDS.

Yet, too often journalists do not have the tools and information necessary to effectively report on HIV/AIDS. According to many African journalists, the media shy away from covering HIV/AIDS because they aren't adequately prepared to report on it. Instead, they sensationalize the disease and avoid important issues in its treatment and prevention.

However, an increasing number of African journalists are seeking seminars, training workshops, and networking opportunities so that they can develop their reporting skills on this complex topic. These journalists stand on the frontlines of the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The African Women's Media Center, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme, created this manual as a tool for media professionals to use in improving and increasing their coverage of HIV/AIDS in Africa. AWMC and UNDP support the idea that, in the face of HIV/AIDS, the media have a responsibility to apply the best journalism principles to their work of reporting accurately and completely on the pandemic.

This handbook provides guidelines and tips for reporters interested in successfully covering HIV/AIDS. Most of the advice was taken from experienced journalists from Africa and other regions of the world, who shared their expertise through interviews, publications, and workshops. The guide starts with the basics of good journalism: objectivity, accuracy, and news value. It includes advice for journalists who want their coverage of HIV/AIDS to be responsible and appealing.

Journalists face myriad challenges in covering HIV/AIDS. They must obtain information from relevant institutions. They must accurately interpret technical data. They must travel long distances to uncover new information. They must find fresh, interesting angles for their stories. They must interview political and public-policy leaders. They must engage in frank and often difficult conversations with people living with HIV/AIDS and their relatives. This manual was designed to help journalists find ways to do all these things and to handle obstacles in their reporting paths.

We hope that *Reporting on HIV/AIDS in Africa: A Manual* will generate discussion in newsrooms

[1] UNAIDS, "AIDS Epidemic Update: December 2001" (Retrieved on December 7, 2001 from *http://www.unaids.org/epidemic_update/report_dec01/index.html#.full*).

about the media's coverage of HIV/AIDS and will lead journalists to discover new angles, new perspectives, and new sources for their stories. In that way, we hope it will take a critical step toward strengthening the media's capacity to play a constructive and valuable role in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The Role of the Media

The media can be a tremendous force in the war on HIV/AIDS. As with other pressing issues, as much in Africa as the other regions of the world, the media are "an essential part of the solution."[2] Given an opportunity to reflect on their role, journalists have been quick to recognize this, and appropriately so.[3] The news media reach a large proportion of the population, and the number of people they reach continues to grow. Different sectors of the news media also reach nearly all segments of the population – rural and urban, rich and poor, young and old, women and men, laypersons and specialists, policy makers and their constituents, communities and their leaders.

Often, news coverage is the first source of new information available on an issue. A vast number of people have come to depend on the media for news and other significant information as soon as it exists, and to a great extent this information can shape people's everyday lives. The media are in a position to create greater public awareness of HIV/AIDS. This awareness is necessary before individuals can take a critical look at the challenges that HIV/AIDS presents, and make informed decisions to help prevent its spread, protect themselves, and ensure proper care and treatment of people with HIV/AIDS. News coverage also reinforces information that people receive about HIV/AIDS from other sources, such as their friends, health care workers, and billboards.

RAISING AWARENESS

The media's role in public awareness, discussion, and debate is significant in various ways:

- The media can generate public and policy discussion of HIV/AIDS, which further encourages public awareness and leads to action by political, financial, and other leaders. Accurate news coverage of HIV/AIDS can generate public and political support for fighting HIV/AIDS.[4]
- The media influence public opinion and attitudes about HIV/AIDS, including attitudes towards people with HIV/AIDS. An analysis of media coverage and public opinion over several decades concluded that there is a strong relationship between them. When the media focus on a particular issue, there is a higher degree of public awareness and support to tackle that issue.[5] Attitudes affect how people respond to HIV/AIDS and how people with HIV/AIDS are treated or cared for by their peers, employers, families, communities, the health care system, and the justice system.
- Similarly, the media influence the language of HIV/AIDS, which in turn helps shape how people think about and deal with HIV/AIDS.
- The media can also point to healthy behaviors – for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, the protection of those who are most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, and for the care of people affected by HIV/AIDS.

[2] Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication, "Violence Against Women -- Journalist Resource." (Retrieved on December 1, 2001 from *http://www.soulcity.org.za/*).

[3] For example, recognition of this role was articulated at a national gathering of reporters in Antananarivo, Madagascar in 1996, a regional gathering of journalists in Johannesburg in 1998, and an international seminar for senior women editors in Durban in 2000.

[4] Robey B., Stauffer P., *Helping the News Media Cover Family Planning.* (Baltimore: Population Reports Series J, 42, 1995).

[5] Schindlamayr T., "Viewpoint: The Media, Public Opinion and Population Assistance: Establishing the Link." *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 27(1), 2001.

How Individual Journalists See Their Role

At the International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa in 2000, a prominent journalist echoed what journalists in Africa have known for a long time – that "it takes a lot of guts to be a reporter," and that in AIDS coverage it "takes a great deal of courage to ask questions and demand answers."[6]

She described her struggle with reporting on HIV/AIDS: "[In 1988] I thought… that it was appropriate to say that it was our job to tell stories, and show the face of the epidemic. Our job was to take the reader, or the listener or viewer, into the epidemic, and display the despair. I was… wrong."

She continued: "It's high time all of us, North and South, stop simply saying, 'It's sad. It's pathetic. The numbers are huge. It's getting worse. Oh my gosh!' We must take our jobs far more seriously than that… . We have to name corrupt names, we have to demand accountability. We have to demand the truth… .The facts must be heard… . The questions must be asked… . And where it exists, success must be underscored and then followed by the question, 'If it works here, why not over there?'"[7]

Journalists also have responsibilities to their editors, publishers, station owners, and senior producers. To them, journalists owe good journalism. One journalist who has reported extensively on HIV/AIDS described a typical editor's directive as being "give me what's sexy, not what's worthy." The challenge this poses to journalists, she related, is to find the right angle from which to report.[8]

Keeping good journalism in mind, then, there are some roles that journalists are *not* supposed to play:

- Journalists are not the spokespersons for private, public or non-governmental organizations.
- Journalists are not health educators, although their coverage can, among other things, effectively educate audiences about HIV/AIDS.

As one editor wrote, "Journalism that tries to be relevant to the people of Africa must deal with the problems and challenges of development. And one of the most central issues of development – indeed the very survival of Africa… is… health." While this idea may resonate with many, HIV/AIDS in Africa is infinitely more than a health issue.[9]

PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENTS

People outside the media sector may idealize what the role of journalists should be in this age of HIV/AIDS. Ultimately, however, it is up to individual journalists to determine their role in and responsibilities to their community, country, and continent, and then to live up to this personal vision.

Over the years, journalists have found it useful to write "personal mission statements."[10] In these, journalists describe their overarching, long-term goals, and present a vision of how they will make a difference in the world, or how they will contribute to the betterment of their communities or societies. They can also include a vision of what it will take to earn the respect and admiration of the journalism profession. These personal mission statements can guide and inspire one's work for years, and allow one to rise above the day-to-day demands, difficulties and pressures.

Exercise: Create a personal mission statement for your goals as a journalist covering HIV/AIDS.

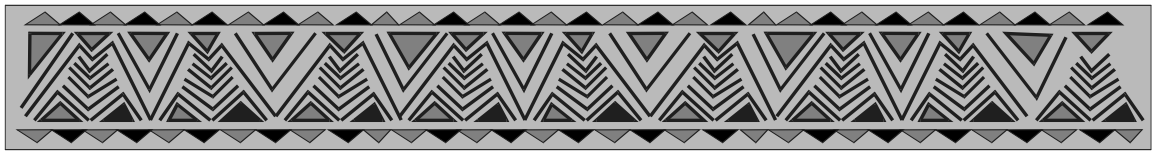
[6] Garrett L. , "'You Just Signed His Death Warrant': AIDS Politics and the Journalists' Role.", *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December 2000.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Soal J. (health reporter, *Cape Times*), Presentation. AIDS & Media Conference, November 28, 2000.

[9] Ngweno HB., Preface. In Beamish J., Vella J. *Developing Health Journalists: A Training Manual for Improving News Coverage of Reproductive Health*. (Research Triangle Park, N.C.: Family Health International, 1991).

[10] From international, regional, and country-level seminars for print, broadcast, and news agency journalists from numerous African countries, as well as from Asia and Latin America, facilitated by J. Beamish, 1990-2000.



Effective Reporting - The Basics

Good news coverage of HIV/AIDS begins with good journalism. This section, which borrows from *Getting the Story*,[11] a manual for journalists, reviews the basic techniques for good journalism.

Inverted Pyramid

First, the effective development and presentation of a story uses the "inverted pyramid" approach. This is true whether it is a hard news report or a feature story. The inverted pyramid approach can also be helpful in the preparation of other types of media coverage, such as commentaries and editorials, interviews and announcements.

- The story begins with the major points. These are presented in the introduction, or lead, which sets the tone of the story and provides a concise summary of the story.
- The body of the story follows the lead, with the points presented in order of importance. The most important, larger points are presented first, and more detailed information later.

Five "Ws" (Who, What, Where, When, Why) and an "H" (How)

Second, a story must present the "Five Ws and the H" – the *who, what, where, when, why,* and *how*. In a news story, the lead normally answers these questions concisely.

Leads

Speaking of leads, there are, of course, different ways to develop them.

- One way, the "hard" lead, is particularly effective for a breaking news piece in which the time element is critical. It summarizes the principal information on an important development, often in one lead sentence. Hard leads may leave the answer of *why* until the body of the story, as it may take a bit more analysis.

  An example of a hard lead:

  "AIDS will cause early death in as many as one-half of the young adults in the hardest-hit countries of southern Africa, causing population imbalances nearly without precedent, according to a report released by the United Nations yesterday."[12]

- Another way is the "soft," or "delayed" lead. It is used when the time element is not critical, and when the most basic facts about an issue or a development are known, but the context and the whole story are still sketchy. Some words to provide the context, background, and/or some other elements that might explain the central information come first.

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[11] International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), *Getting the Story. Unit 1. The Basics of Professional Journalism: Reporting, Writing and Editing*, (Reston, VA: ICFJ, 1990).

[12] Brown D., "U.N. Warns of African AIDS Toll.", *Washington Post*, June 28, 2000.

An example of a soft lead:

"Despite drawing children from a mix of middle-class and shanty housing, Olympic Estate Primary School regularly finishes at or near the top among public schools on Kenya's national examinations.

"Its 40 teachers are proud of their record and happy to talk about it. But something that they're more reluctant to discuss is the effect of AIDS on their school. Since 1996, four teachers – that's 10 percent of the staff – have died of AIDS.

"In fact, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), there is a disproportionately high incidence of HIV/AIDS among teachers in sub-Saharan Africa – although no one seems to have a good explanation. In Kenya alone, nearly 1,500 teachers died last year, up from just 10 teachers' deaths in 1993."[13]

- A variation on the soft lead is the anecdote or "microcosm." It is useful for handling important but complex or technical subjects.

An example of a microcosm lead:

" 'I really trusted my husband,' says Brigitte Syamaleuwe, a 40-year-old Zambian woman. She knew she hadn't had sex with anyone else, so when she tested HIV-positive she felt 'totally shattered.'

"She's hardly an exception. A study from nearby Uganda found that 60 percent of HIV-positive women were married and monogamous… ."[14]

Here, the soft lead immediately puts a human face on the broader issue of HIV/AIDS. Journalists may take the soft lead a step further, using a bit more space than usual to create a rich context and build to a climax to present the key piece of information. But from the point where the principal fact is presented, the inverted pyramid approach still applies.

News Value

The core element of good news coverage is the news value of a story. Here are a few, varying definitions of news:

- Events that have an impact on many people, that describe unusual or exceptional situations, and that concern well-known or prominent people. Conflict, proximity, timeliness and currency will further enhance the news value of a story.
- Something that one didn't know before, had forgotten, or did not understand.
- An event that is dramatic or that touches audiences personally.
- News depends on the audience. Different groups of people – young, old, urban, rural, men, women – have varying lifestyles, concerns and needs, which give them different news interests.

Sometimes a current event – the news element – dictates the story. Other times a story, such as a feature, which transcends a recent event or spans more than just several hours or days, relates to current events or other significant news that captures the audience's interest.

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[13] Crawley M., "How AIDS Undercuts Education in Africa.", *Christian Science Monitor*, July 25, 2000.

[14] Schoofs M. , "The Deadly Gender Gap.", *The Village Voice*, December 30, 1998.

More on Effective Reporting[15]

Accuracy

A good story with inaccuracies, however small these inaccuracies are, does not exist. While it seems obvious that all the facts, names, quotes, numbers, dates and places in a story must be perfectly accurate, it is not uncommon to find that they are incorrect. When this happens, the journalist's credibility is undermined, the media's reputation is compromised, and the story is badly damaged. It is imperative for the journalist to get the facts, names, quotes, numbers, dates, and places right; by checking them once, and then checking them again before reporting them.

An accurate story tells the complete story, not just one side or part of the story. This is *not* to say, however, that a story needs to tell all there is to say about HIV/AIDS. It means that the specific story needs to be reported in full. Leaving out key information can distort the truth. For example, a story may use a figure on the number of people who have AIDS in a given year and in a given place. But the number of people with AIDS – who have the symptoms of AIDS – is small compared to the number of people who are estimated to have HIV but have not shown the symptoms, or do not even know they have been infected with HIV. Talking only about the numbers of confirmed cases of AIDS can therefore be misleading.

Researchers have to be careful and qualify their assertions with such phrases as "these findings could indicate" or "the results suggest." Journalists must reflect the tentativeness of the research findings and avoid reporting them as final, conclusive evidence.

Using Statistics in a Story

- When reporting statistics, be careful to make sure you understand precisely what the numbers mean. It is easy to miss the true significance of a statistic and subsequently report the wrong information.
- Ask about the source of statistics, their reliability, and the currency of the information.
- Be sure to explain any differences and discrepancies. Statistics can seem contradictory. However, they are usually different for a legitimate reason. For example, different population groups may have been involved in a survey, or data may have come from different time periods.
- Provide dates for the data. Studies produced a year or more before are not necessarily out of date. Some studies take months or years to conduct, after which the findings need to be analyzed. Even if the statistics relate to a study (such as a national survey) started several years before, they may be current if they were just released.

Balance

Journalists always have to seek balance in their reporting, and the traditional way to do this is to show contrasting sides of the story. If the journalist is not careful, however, this can lead into a trap. There may well be two sides of the story, but they may not be equal. For example, there may be wide consensus in the research community about a particular point, and just a small dissenting opinion. Giving both sides equal weight is misleading and poor journalism. The journalist should accurately reflect which side carries more or less weight and why.

[15] Murray D., *Writing for Your Readers: Notes on the Writer's Craft from The Boston Globe,* (Chester, CT: Globe Pequot, 1983) and Nelson P., *Ten Practical Tips for Environmental Reporting*,. (Reston, VA: Center for Foreign Journalists and World Wide Fund for Nature, 1995).

Another way journalists seek balance or objectivity in their stories is to remain neutral. However, HIV/AIDS is a topic that tempts journalists to become advocates and crusaders. While there is certainly an important place for advocacy, reporters for the mainstream media will do their audiences a great service, and build their reputation as exceptional journalists, if they do not become crusaders, but focus on finding the facts, verifying them, and reporting the information without bias.

There are exceptions, however. Reporters for specialized programs and publications of HIV/AIDS-related non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups, and service institutions are encouraged to write and broadcast stories that reflect their point of view. In addition, journalists who have come out publicly as being HIV positive or as having AIDS might write editorials, columns and opinion pieces about HIV/AIDS.

Clarity and Simplicity

One of the greatest challenges of reporting on HIV/AIDS involves turning technical terminology, medical jargon, scientific concepts and research data into clear and concise language. Journalists run the risk of interpreting technical information incorrectly. There are ways to ensure against misintepretation:

- Ask the source to translate the information. Don't be afraid to look stupid. You're doing the smart thing by asking more questions.
- If this isn't possible, run your translation by the source to make sure you got it right.
- Create and build your own reference guide with definitions, and then insert these into your story when you need them, saving yourself time.
- Use the Internet to find credible HIV/AIDS-related advocacy groups, research institutions and non-governmental organizations.
- Never assume that the audience knows anything even mildly technical about the HIV/AIDS story, but don't assume that your readers/listeners/viewers are ignorant, either.

An article by Eunice Mathu published in Kenya's *Parents* magazine (December 2000) reported that more women than men are becoming infected with HIV/AIDS. That was the news. Mathu then went on to examine the larger forces behind this news. Among other factors, she described how:

> "Various traditional practices expose African women to HIV infection. For example, early forced marriages for girls and wife inheritance create high risks of HIV infection. Widow inheritance, commonly baptized as home guardianship, is common in East and Southern Africa. In Kenya, it is common in the Luo community. When a husband dies, one of his brothers or cousins marries the widow to ensure that the children remain within the late husband's clan and that the widow and her children are provided for. If the… woman is infected, she could pass on the virus to her guardian…"

She continues to explain the reverberating consequences:

> "In many instances, HIV-positive… women are abandoned by their husbands with no legal or economic recourse. Recently, a Kenyan man ejected his HIV-positive wife from their main house to live in modestly furnished servants' quarters."

Mathu tells the story clearly and concisely, and then reports on a landmark and unusual legal ruling in favor of the wife.

Focus

The best stories are those that are clearly focused. Readers, listeners, and viewers like a story that they can digest easily. HIV/AIDS stories can be long and complicated. Don't try to tell everything at once.

- Start a plan for a series of reports, features, or shows that will tell the story of HIV/AIDS.
- Each piece can tell a separate story, as well as tell part of the bigger story.
- Take one point at a time, illustrate one thing at a time, and prepare one focused story at a time.

The Context and the Larger Forces Behind the Story

Preparing a focused story does not by any means preclude providing the context and showing the larger forces at work behind the story. On the contrary, a good HIV/AIDS story must dig under the surface to find out what is really going on. For example:

- Why did certain political figures take a particular stand on HIV/AIDS?
- What are the economic conditions that force people into situations that put them at elevated risk for HIV/AIDS?
- What are the patterns of behavior that put people at risk for HIV/AIDS?
- What are the beliefs and attitudes that might explain these behavior patterns?
- What are the social and cultural norms and practices behind certain patterns of contracting HIV?

An effective story provides some context, or perspective, so the audience knows where the story is going, where it comes from, and how widespread or typical it is.

In a story filed from Burkina Faso, the journalist quickly and succinctly revealed important new trends, focused the story locally by extracting facts about the country from global data, mentioned actions that are being taken to address the problem, and identified some of the larger forces behind those trends. This excerpt shows how the journalist starts the article and begins to explore the trends:

> "The rapid spread of the AIDS pandemic in Burkina Faso presents a serious challenge to development in the country, which ranks third [in proportion of people with HIV] in West Africa, behind Côte d'Ivoire and Togo…
>
> "Burkina is in double jeopardy *[doublement victime de]* with its geographic situation and economic frailty.
>
> "Surrounded by six states, it is a transit point for Mali and Niger, which involves risks linked to internal and external migration.
>
> "Further, limited coverage of health care, low levels of schooling, and especially women's precarious status help fuel the pandemic."

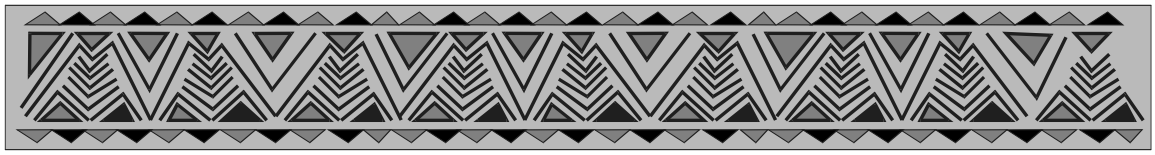
Avoiding Clichés

Journalists who cover HIV/AIDS must be careful to avoid clichés, which could lead to false assumptions and incorrect conclusions. They must also avoid searching for only what they expect to find and using only the materials or outcomes they expect to find. Editors and managers may compound this problem by giving an assignment that involves just filling in the blanks of a preconceived story. It is up to the reporter to find unexpected material. Therefore, it is essential that the journalist hold on to a sense of innocence in order to see what is new.

SEARCH FOR THE NEW AND UNEXPECTED

Look for what is not being said:

- Look carefully and critically at the environment of the person you are interviewing to see what it can tell you.
- Listen to what is being said, not to what you expect will be said. Don't just look for confirmation of your assumptions, listen for something you haven't thought of before.
- Interview subjects you might not have considered. Don't just go to the "usual suspects" for your information or your human-interest angle.
- Look for stories beyond events. There are important things going on that haven't been reported because they didn't occur suddenly, openly, with a big splash and in the typical, news-making way.
- Look for hidden events. ***(See the next section.)***



How Can the Story of HIV/AIDS in Africa become Newsworthy?

We started hearing about HIV/AIDS more than 20 years ago. It would therefore not be surprising to hear a journalist remark that the HIV/AIDS story has already been told, and that it is not news any more. That would be like saying that politics has already been done so it is not news anymore.

The truth is that HIV/AIDS continues to be newsworthy. Many parts of the HIV/AIDS story have not been covered yet, and there are countless angles that haven't been explored. There are new developments surrounding HIV/AIDS every day, whether it is in research, prevention and care programs, trends in the epidemic, or how HIV/AIDS is affecting people and societies.

Also, while HIV/AIDS has traditionally been a health story, it is, in fact, much bigger. It is also political, economic, social and cultural. It is local, national and global. It is about individuals, communities, regions, nations and the world.

What Makes a Story Newsworthy?

Looking at what makes a story newsworthy can help us understand the news value of HIV/AIDS. An issue of *Population Reports* synthesizes the elements that provide the news value in a story.[16] These are immediacy, proximity, consequence, human interest, trends, important people, and conflict and controversy.

Immediacy: Something that has just happened or is currently happening. Just a few, obvious examples of immediacy in the HIV/AIDS field include new study findings, such as on the rates and patterns of HIV infection; the launch of new programs, such as those to prevent HIV/AIDS or care for people with HIV/AIDS; the release of a new publication; the ratification of a new convention/plan of action; the development of new policies.

Proximity: An event or issue that is close to the news audience. A story is more appealing if it can be related to the national or local context or events. While an international event may have good news value, it will be much more interesting if the journalist can give it a local angle, and show how that event is relevant to the audience. A story on a special session of the United Nations General Assembly on HIV/AIDS is much more likely to appeal to the journalist's audience if it shows where her/his country or community comes into the picture. For example, the journalist can report on what new funding commitments made at the General Assembly mean for the country.

In a story released from Tanzania by the Pan African News Agency, the reporter wrote, "The pandemic is eating away at the most important resource of the country, which is its youth… . Mr. Mkapa announced that there are at least 600,000 orphans under the age of 15 who have lost both their parents to this disease… ." At the end of the article, the reporter writes, "From only three declared cases in 1983, AIDS has become the leading cause of death of adults in certain regions of Tanzania."

[16] Robey B., Stauffer P., *Helping the News Media Cover Family Planning*. (Baltimore: Population Reports Series J, 42, 1995).

Consequence: An issue that affects people's lives. An event or issue will make an attractive story if the journalist can show how it has a bearing on the audience, or what the implications are to the audience. For example, the consequences of HIV/AIDS on family structures and relationships, communities, education, or businesses can make for a powerful story. The journalist will be most effective by showing these consequences in ways that are easy for the audience to grasp.

Trends: General tendencies, or the general direction of events. These are dynamic and rich in news value. Epidemiological, economic and social trends testify as to how HIV/AIDS is changing people's lives. New data on infection rates or on the population groups that are being most affected by HIV/AIDS have great news value. The feminization of the epidemic illustrates this point. New findings on how HIV/AIDS is affecting people and communities economically make for a great story. It is particularly interesting to discover new findings on trends that challenge old assumptions.

Human-interest: The human face of HIV/AIDS. The statistics, science, economics, and politics of HIV/AIDS need to be illustrated with the people who are affected and to whom the audience can relate. A few examples of people whose experiences can provide an appealing human interest angle are teachers, leaders, advocates, wives and mothers with HIV/AIDS, married couples, children and young adults, individuals working in an industry hard hit by HIV/AIDS, pioneers in the HIV/AIDS prevention and care field, and AIDS orphans.

An article entitled "HIV-positive Florence: The Face of Courage and Hope," by Eunice Mathu of *Parents* magazine in Kenya (September 2000), is a good example of how a journalist treats a subject with compassion, and how one can put a human face – a positive one – on an HIV/AIDS story.

First, the writer tells the story of Florence and how she became HIV-positive:

> "An only child from her mother's first marriage, her mother… sacrificed her for her second marriage. The man would not marry her mother with a child tagging along, so Florence was left in the care of her grandmother. Her mother was to have seven other children from this second marriage, and as a result, Florence was forgotten at her mother's house. Although her grandmother… was a loving and caring woman, she was a domestic worker and only went home over the weekends. Florence was left in the care of her… uncles. The older uncle was cruel and abusive to Florence. Although her grandmother was aware of her son's cruelty to her granddaughter, she could do nothing about it, as she depended on him for financial support.
>
> "At the age of 17, Florence met a boy who became her best friend. He convinced her to have sex with him to prove her love for him. For fear of losing her newfound friend, she started having sex with him regularly… ."

The writer continues with the story, successfully illustrating some of the forces that put women at risk for HIV/AIDS. She then goes on to describe how Florence is now an active member of the national association of people living with AIDS, how "she works with numerous non-governmental organizations on AIDS projects. She is spokesperson for people infected with HIV, comforting them and striving to prevent others, especially young people, from becoming infected."

Important people: "Big names make news."[17] One can always link an HIV/AIDS story to well-known people such as government officials, popular entertainers, sports stars, community leaders, tribal chiefs, and successful business people. These big names can be involved through their work on policy,

[17] Ibid.

advocacy, education, funding, economics, or through their personal experiences with HIV/AIDS. Leaders in the HIV/AIDS field can also become big names through media coverage of their leadership, accomplishments, or research.

An editorial in Nigeria's *Daily Trust* attracted its readers' attention with this: "The convergence of 35 world leaders… to deliberate on the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa is a demonstration of the seriousness the problem has assumed." The editorial covered a lot of ground in just a few inches, and wrapped up with, "We also identify with the emergency the summit declared… and hope African leaders will comply with the resolution to set aside 15 percent of their annual budgets for health."

Conflict and controversy: HIV/AIDS involves sexuality, politics, big business, and challenges to cultural norms and traditional practices, among other things. These topics can be controversial, embroiled in conflict and debate — fuel for a good story. But a good news story must also clarify the issues to fully explain the controversy. Covering HIV/AIDS in greater depth and in new ways may in itself create controversy. As long as the journalist is responsible, providing the facts, remaining impartial, treating the subjects fairly, creating controversy is acceptable and even laudable. (Of course, a media outlet may justifiably opt to take a stand on a controversial issue or during a conflict. The place for this is in clearly defined opinion pieces, such as editorials.)

EXTRAORDINARY AND HIDDEN EVENTS

There is a useful distinction made between "extraordinary" events and "hidden" events that are newsworthy.[18]

- Extraordinary events become known without the help of the media. The news of these events spreads spontaneously. Examples of such events are wars, political and government changes, and natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, or severe droughts.
- Hidden events remain unknown for a long time – often, too long – without the involvement of the media. Changing trends in the HIV/AIDS epidemic is one broad example of a hidden event.

KNOWING THE AUDIENCE

Knowing one's audience is key to developing an appealing story. Typically, not enough effort is put into finding out the interests and needs of the audience. Yet, it is crucial for a journalist to understand the audience to be able to produce a story that will really sell while doing much more than simply entertaining.

Here are some things that journalists should find out about their audience:

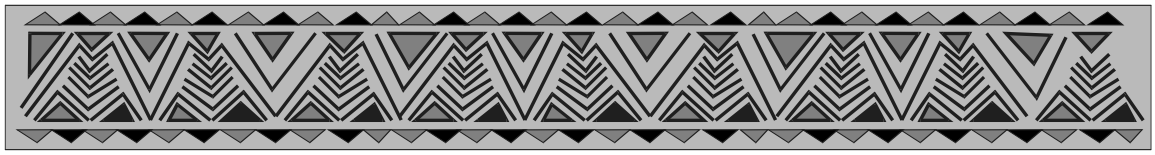
- What is the gender mix?
- What is its general level of literacy and education?
- What language(s) are spoken and understood?
- Who are the opinion leaders in this audience?
- What is its economic status?
- Is the audience primarily urban or rural?
- What are the predominant occupations?
- When do certain segments of the audience tune in to the radio or television?
- What is its medium of information?
- How has HIV/AIDS affected the audience?
- What is the age range?

[18] International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), *Getting the Story. Unit 1. The Basics of Professional Journalism: Reporting, Writing and Editing*, (Reston, VA: ICFJ, 1990).

Similarly, journalists often work without knowing how the audience is affected by her or his stories. Inviting audience feedback can help to understand how to develop stories that appeal to the audience and provide useful information.

An audience survey is one way to garner audience opinion, although it requires some expertise and resources that may not be readily available. An enterprising journalist or media manager could team up with some graduate students of public health or another social science to conduct such a survey. A more modest approach could involve distributing a simple questionnaire to readers. Journalists and editors can explicitly invite feedback, either through letters to the editor or by inviting listeners to call in to the station.

Exercise: Answer the above questions to determine your audience and then develop stories on HIV/AIDS that focus on these demographics. List other ways you can learn more about your audience.



Professional Standards and Ethics of Reporting

Universal guidelines for ethical media coverage can be applied to reporting on HIV/AIDS. In brief, these tenets call for media coverage that "stands out in its fairness, accuracy, and objectiveness."[19] Supplement these rules for ethical journalism with specific guidelines for ethical reporting on HIV/AIDS drawn from forums with African journalists[20] and some recent publications.[21] [22]

Newsgathering

- Pursue the truth. The public has a right to the truth, and this right should not be compromised.
- Provide the latest relevant and interesting news to the public.
- Keep the facts straight. Distortion of facts is unacceptable.
- Present the whole story. Avoid omitting key information that would distort the story. Censorship of relevant information is unethical because it deprives the public of information needed to make well-informed decisions.
- Only authentic sources of information should be used and cited.
- Conversations should only be taped if the source gives explicit permission for taping, and only when the source is fully aware of it.
- The source of information should be protected:
  - Journalists must respect an individual's right to privacy and human dignity.
  - Confidentiality must be maintained. Information that was shared in confidence must not be reported; the identity of a person with HIV/AIDS should not be disclosed without the explicit permission of that person.
  - Information should be collected honestly and not illicitly. When a source shares information with the journalist with the understanding that it was simply part of a personal conversation, this information should remain private unless the source gives the journalist express permission to use it in a story.
- Only the media organization for which the journalist works should compensate the journalist for covering stories. Accepting payment from interested parties creates a conflict of interest for the

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[19] Andoh IF., "Ethics in Newsgathering." In: FP Kasoma, Ed. *Journalism Ethics in Africa*, (Nairobi: African Council for Communication Education, 1994).

[20] For example, from the AWMC/IWMF cyber-forums on Reporting on Women and HIV/AIDS in Africa.

[21] Foreman M., "An Ethical Guide to Reporting HIV/AIDS." In: STK Boafo, CA Arnaldo, Eds. *Media & HIV/AIDS in East and Southern Africa: A Resource Book*,(Paris: UNESCO, 2000).

[22] World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, "Radio Against AIDS. Radio and AIDS Prevention: What You Need to Know" (Retrieved on December 6, 2001 from *http://www.amarc.org/raa/html/handbook/hbk_main.html*).

journalist and undermines the credibility of the news story.

- Journalists should not expect, request, or accept payment for attending meetings, workshops, or conferences; the expectation of an allowance should not be the factor that motivates a journalist to attend such forums.

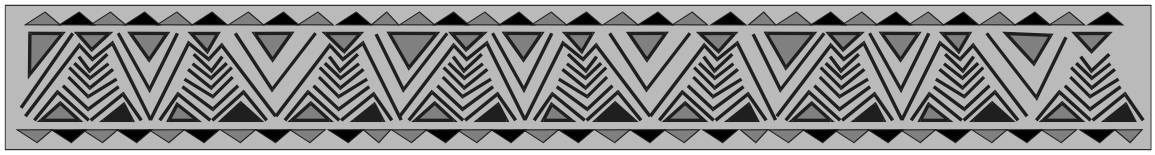
(For more about confidentiality and how to handle people with HIV/AIDS and others affected by HIV/AIDS, see the chapter "Covering Those Affected by HIV/AIDS.")

REPORTING INFORMATION

Ethical reporting demands that when a journalist does not understand information, she/he must seek clarification of that information before reporting it. Clarification is especially important in reporting on HIV/AIDS because it can be difficult to fully understand scientific information. For example, epidemiological data (such as prevalence and incidence – two different measures of infection rates) can be very revealing yet easy to misunderstand and report out of context.

A news story must be covered objectively; the journalist needs to remain emotionally detached from the event, and refrain from taking sides. News should be based on facts, not emotions.

- The topic of AIDS "cures" and treatments, for example, demands particular scrutiny, and should be reported critically.
- When getting close or friendly with a source of information – either an individual or an institution – journalists need to pay particular attention to providing facts-based stories and objective portrayals.



Covering Those Affected by HIV/AIDS

Reporting on HIV/AIDS presents many challenges to journalists. Perhaps the biggest challenge is how to deal with people who have HIV/AIDS or who are otherwise affected by it – in interviews, off-the-record conversations, photograph, and stories. Guarding the privacy of these people and refraining from reporting confidential information, avoiding placing blame and perpetuating stereotypes, and refraining from treating them as victims are essential for ethical, just, and constructive coverage of HIV/AIDS.

As with anyone dealing with a difficult issue, the first step is to examine one's own feelings, fears, vulnerabilities, and biases about the issue. This is imperative for journalists, whose personal sentiments and beliefs may strongly influence how they approach and report a story.

Privacy and Confidentiality

When interviewing someone who has been affected by HIV/AIDS, it is crucial to be sensitive to his or her needs and perspectives. It may be helpful to prepare some questions for the interview and to ask someone from a local HIV/AIDS service organization to comment on their appropriateness. It is also helpful to go over the questions with the source before the interview, or before the person agrees to the interview.

Confidentiality must always be honored, particularly when the source is a person living with HIV/AIDS or otherwise closely affected by HIV/AIDS. Below are some guidelines to deal with interviewees:

- Make interviewees aware of possible consequences of revealing their identities. Incidents of people with HIV/AIDS being ostracized, persecuted, and even murdered after their identities and HIV status were made public are widespread. Gugulethu Dlamini, a South African woman, was one such casualty. She was stoned and beaten to death in a township when it became known that she had HIV.
- Approach potential interviewees with care and tact.
  - Brief interviewees and let them prepare for the interview.
  - Potential interviewees who are afraid of speaking with journalists may be approached through a safe intermediary, such as an AIDS service organization. This intermediary can help the journalist treat the interviewee sensitively, and can shield the interviewee from unfair questioning.

Avoiding Blame and Harmful Stereotypes

It is important for journalists covering HIV/AIDS to identify the behaviors that put one at risk rather than the type of person that may be at higher risk. High-risk behaviors include unprotected sexual intercourse, sharing needles for injections, and having sex with multiple partners. There are also activities that can

indirectly lead to a high risk for HIV by increasing high-risk behaviors; some obvious examples are the use of drugs and alcohol, and soliciting the services of sex workers.

It is also important to reveal how HIV can be transmitted to people who are not necessarily engaging in high-risk behaviors. For example, someone who is raped is at risk for HIV. Someone who gets a blood transfusion where screening mechanisms for blood banks are not fully in place may also be at risk for HIV. It is not uncommon for married and monogamous women to be at risk for HIV because their husbands secretly engage in unprotected sex with other partners.

Besides behaviors, attitudes play a major role in the spread of HIV/AIDS, and will continue to shape the future course of policy decisions. As the media can have a tremendous influence on attitudes, journalists need to critically examine attitudes about HIV/AIDS and then expose them.

Early reporting on HIV/AIDS focused on high-risk groups such as sex workers. This narrow reporting reflected and fueled an attitude of self-righteousness, of "us versus them," which insinuated that those with HIV/AIDS got their just deserts. People with HIV/AIDS have sometimes been used in the media to feed the panic over HIV/AIDS. However, ethical and effective journalism calls for honoring their right to privacy, their dignity, and their feelings.

Objective news stories will focus less on how the news source became infected with HIV, and more on other aspects of the person's experience. Florence Ngobeni is an AIDS counselor at a hospital in Soweto, South Africa. Since publicly revealing that she has HIV, she has granted many interviews to journalists. She says that journalists often ask her, "How did you get HIV?" This question implies to her that she – the person with HIV – is to blame for having HIV, and reflects the personal bias and insensitivity of the journalists.[23]

AVOIDING STEREOTYPES

In order to break away from perpetuating stereotypes in news stories, journalists should break out of the "usual suspects" trap when searching for people who can provide the human-interest angle of the story.

- Go to people with whom audiences can relate, the "person next door," such as a married, middle-class mother.
- Consider model citizens and leaders, such as popular sports figures, other celebrities and successful professionals, respected political leaders, and influential members of the community.
- Look for population groups that have not been covered much by the media, but whose special circumstances may make them particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. For example, adolescents, migrant workers, and women refugees are at elevated risk for HIV/AIDS.

Empowering Versus Victimizing

People with or otherwise affected by HIV/AIDS should not be portrayed as irresponsible, as it is often untrue, and implying irresponsibility is pointless and biased.

People living with HIV/AIDS are not victims. As Florence Ngobeni explains, portraying them as victims assumes that they are helpless and unable to make their own decisions, which is false. Charlene Smith, a South African journalist who has covered AIDS and reported on her own experience of being

[23] Azarcon Dela Cruz P. , "AIDS Reporting." *Philippine Journalism Review*.

raped by a man who may have been HIV-positive, says, "We are only victims if we are dead."[24]

People with HIV/AIDS can be leaders, activists, celebrities, spokespersons; they can be active, productive, successful; they can enjoy good health for many years; they can live fulfilling, happy lives. It is crucial to portray these "models" in coverage of HIV/AIDS. It is also honest to portray them as they are part of the real picture of HIV/AIDS.

A POSITIVE SPIN

In a radio broadcast in Ghana, producer Sarah Akrofi-Quarcoo[25] reported on mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. She started with an example of a woman and her baby, then gave some figures to illustrate the situation around the world and in Ghana, and then she gave the story its first positive spin:

"… transmission is reduced when HIV-positive pregnant women take antiretroviral drugs and avoid breastfeeding their newborns. These two measures, combined with delivery of the baby by Cesarean section, have dramatically decreased mother-to child transmission."

The journalist delves deeper to reveal the situation of most women in her country and the obstacles they face. For example, she says that "in most cases, women only know their status through their child's ailment or death." She shows other obstacles, but then concludes the story with this:

"Reproductive health education and information remain the single most powerful preventive tools." Akrofi-Quarcoo has presented the real situation, which certainly is bleak in some ways, but also shows that something can certainly be done.

Compassion and Support

People with HIV/AIDS need and deserve care and compassion. As important as it is for a journalist to understand her subject, it is crucial that she understand people with HIV/AIDS.

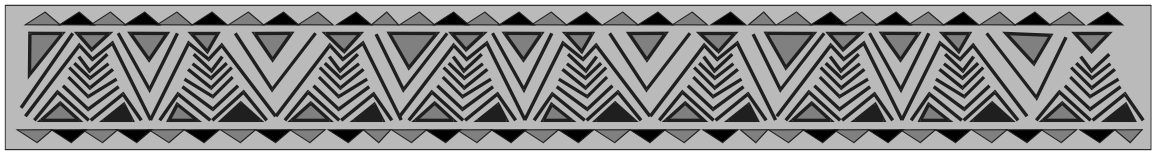
However, beware of expressing sympathy. People with HIV/AIDS do not need or want pity. On the contrary, they will perceive that the person expressing pity considers him/her to be powerless, hopeless, and unable to make choices.

Handling the Bereaved

Those who are mourning the loss of their loved ones deserve respect. It is inappropriate to force a microphone or a camera into the face of a mourning relative. A journalist should only attend a funeral by invitation from or with the consent of the family of the deceased.

[24] Smith C. Transcript of a Discussion During the Cyber-Training Course, Reporting on HIV/AIDS and Women in Africa, September 25-29, 2000, Organized by the African Women's Media Center of the International Women's Media Foundation, and Facilitated by J. Beamish. http:\\www.awmc.com.

[25] Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. July 29, 2000.



The Language of HIV/AIDS

Stigma, prejudices, fear, and misconceptions surrounding HIV/AIDS are only too abundant. The language we use to conceptualize and talk about HIV/AIDS reflects our personal biases and particular understanding (or lack of understanding). At the same time, this language also helps shape our own and others' attitudes about HIV/AIDS. One cannot overemphasize, therefore, the ethical importance of the media using appropriate language when covering HIV/AIDS. Appropriate language is constructive, does not fuel stereotypes, and does not cause prejudice.

There are three main points to consider about language:

1. It is essential to use language appropriate to the journalist's audience. The use of language is not just the question of whether to use a local dialect, but how to phrase concepts, and what type of vocabulary to use. To find the appropriate language, a journalist needs to build her/his understanding of her audience, and to become "fluent" in HIV/AIDS terminology.
2. Language has strong influence on attitudes toward HIV/AIDS and people affected by HIV/AIDS. It can be damaging or it can be non-judgmental, positive, and constructive. Good media coverage of HIV/AIDS uses neutral, gender-sensitive language.
3. HIV/AIDS involves highly technical terminology. It is imperative for journalists to "translate" this terminology into ideas and terms that their audiences can readily understand. It is also crucial to ensure that the language used in stories is accurate. Good journalism requires journalists to understand the facts about HIV/AIDS, and to get these across to their audiences in ways the audiences can understand.

The Language of HIV/AIDS[26]

Language to Avoid	Recommended Language
AIDS scourge, plague. These imply that HIV/AIDS cannot be controlled. These are sensationalist terms. They can fuel panic, discrimination and hopelessness.	*HIV epidemic* *HIV pandemic*
AIDS test. This does not exist. AIDS is diagnosed according to specific medical criteria that identify the symptoms of AIDS.	*HIV test.* Tests do exist to determine whether a person has HIV. These tests look for antibodies to HIV present in a person's blood.
To catch AIDS. AIDS cannot be caught or transmitted. People can become infected with HIV.	*To become infected with HIV*
Transmission of HIV is also correct, but it puts the emphasis on who and how the virus is transmitted. Very often,	*To contract HIV* *To become HIV-positive*

[26] Foreman M. , "An Ethical Guide to Reporting HIV/AIDS." In: STK Boafo, CA Arnaldo, Eds. *Media & HIV/AIDS in East and Southern Africa: A Resource Book*, (Paris: UNESCO, 2000).

individuals with HIV do not know when they became infected with HIV, so specialists in the HIV/AIDS field suggest not dwelling on this.	
AIDS sufferer. Many people with HIV/AIDS can have relatively good health for years. They can lead happy lives.	*HIV-positive person*
AIDS victim. Victim suggests that the person is powerless.	*Person living with HIV (or person living with HIV/AIDS, or person living with AIDS)*
Innocent victim. Nobody chooses to have HIV. "Victim" and "innocent" suggest that there is someone who is guilty.	*Person with HIV (or person with HIV/AIDS, or person with AIDS)*
Safe sex. No sex with a partner is ever completely risk-free, even when using a condom, which can greatly reduce but never fully eliminate the risk.	*Safer sex*
Promiscuous. This is accusatory and derogatory.	*Having multiple partners*
Prostitute. This is a derogatory, insulting, value-laden word.	*Sex worker, commercial sex worker*
Drug abuser, drug addict. Many people who use drugs consider that they are in control of their use of drugs, and that they are not abusing them and are not addicted to them. Calling them abusers or addicts alienates them, which serves no good purpose. It is the act of injecting with a contaminated needle, not the drug use itself, that can transmit HIV.	*Intravenous drug user*
Homosexual. Not appropriate in the African context. This is a Western idea of one's identity. In different regions of the world, men who have sex with men do not necessarily have a gay or homosexual identity.	*Men who have sex with men*
To die of AIDS. AIDS is not a disease. It is a syndrome – or a group of illnesses – resulting from a weakening of the immune system. This weakening is caused by HIV and opens the body to "opportunistic" diseases – that is, illnesses that take advantage of weak immunity.	*To die of a [specific] illness, such as tuberculosis or cancer.* *To die of an AIDS-related illness*

Sources of Information

Creating a list of good information sources is essential for the professional survival of a journalist. Because of the complexities surrounding HIV/AIDS, journalists need a wide array of sources to provide quotes, background information, explanations of complex aspects or technical details, useful suggestions and leads, new findings or other news, and even contact with other sources. It takes work to locate good information sources.

Journalists do well to build time into their schedules to conduct research, and to make research an integral and important part of their work.

A reporter for *Business Day* in South Africa found a good story in a set of comparative studies on discrimination, stigma, and denial surrounding HIV/AIDS in India and Uganda, and then followed the story up with quotes from international and local authorities and activists. (These studies are available from UNAIDS; one way to find them is through the Internet.)

The reporter wrote, "Fear and shame drive the shabby treatment of HIV-positive people and, in some countries… the humiliation extends beyond this life… . There was clear evidence that rejection and ostracism continued [in Uganda]… . Despite efforts by the government and nongovernmental organizations and communities over the years, the condition was still perceived there as linked to 'promiscuity and sexual wrongdoing.'"

The author skillfully wove some positive news into the story, citing a local AIDS activist and the UNAIDS director, who each had constructive suggestions for better dealing with HIV/AIDS.

Finding and Working with Sources[27]

A common place to start or expand a list of sources is to identify what sources fellow journalists are quoting in their stories. However, this is just a start. Too often, the same sources are quoted over and over again, which can bore audiences and limit what is covered on the different aspects of HIV/AIDS.

The next step is to build a network of sources by asking each of the original sources to recommend a new one. In fact, at the end of every interview, a journalist should ask the interviewee if there is anyone else with whom the journalist should speak.

It is important to evaluate these sources to determine whether they are credible and respected by their peers, whether they have been honest in the information they have provided, and whether they are cooperative. If not, they are not worth keeping as sources.

There are two important aspects to note about source cooperation. First, for various reasons, many of which are perfectly legitimate, potential sources may be afraid of speaking with the media. They or their colleagues may have had bad experiences with the media. Often this is the result of a gap in communication between the source and the journalist. However, a conscientious and dedicated journalist can – and should – try, gently and courteously, to encourage cooperation by the source.

[27] Nelson P., *Ten Practical Tips for Environmental Reporting*,. (Reston, VA: Center for Foreign Journalists and World Wide Fund for Nature, 1995).

Second, journalists often encounter some difficulties in obtaining current information from government sources, especially when reporters seek the latest statistics on HIV/AIDS. Journalists should not be deterred when a government source is not available. On the contrary, there are many other places to go for up-to-date information. For example, one could go to a local non-governmental organization or the national chapter of an international relief agency, such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent or World Health Organization, for an important statistic. Even if the statistics that are available are not for the whole country, they can tell a story about what is happening in a more localized area or in a certain section of the population. Here are some other examples that one journalist shared:

- Go to school officials to find out about the number of teachers who won't return to school next year versus the year before as a result of HIV/AIDS.
- Talk to funeral home directors for comparative numbers of deaths or comparative ages at time of death.

Getting the Most Out of Good Sources

Good sources are priceless, and successful journalists maintain good working relationships with these sources. Following are some useful tips for maintaining and getting the most out of good sources:

- Follow the ethical principles of newsgathering and covering HIV/AIDS.
- Treat sources fairly, not only for the sake of the source, but also for the long-term benefit of the journalist.
- Get in the habit of giving and exchanging information with the source. Don't call the source only when something is needed.
- Arrive prepared for the conversation or interview:
  - Don't waste the source's time.
  - Find out the source's viewpoint. In the case of technical sources, find out about their work and major accomplishments.
  - If possible, review the questions with the source ahead of time. At the very least, explain what kind of information is needed.
- Identify yourself as a journalist and explain, truthfully, the nature of the story.
- Avoid, at all costs, misquoting the source or taking her/his comments out of context. It can happen unintentionally, so the journalist needs to do everything in her/his power to guard against it. Anything that goes in quotation marks must be exactly what the source said, and how she/he said it.
- Treat sources with respect and courtesy, even when asking hard questions. Too often, journalists can confuse being rude with being good journalists.
- Set some ground rules for the interview. Explain, in clear terms, that:
  - "On the record" means that the source's name can be used, and that the information can be quoted. Ideally, everything remains on the record.
  - "On background" means that the source of the information remains anonymous. It may be possible to give a vague description of the source (such as "a community outreach worker"), but this is not license to hint at the identity of the source.
  - "Deep background" means that the journalist can use the information but only without any reference to the source.

- "Off the record" means that no information from the interview can be reported. The catch here is that the same information may be accessible elsewhere.

- Explain, with tact, that the journalist's main responsibility is to her/his audience. She/he cannot be a spokesperson for the source, but she/he will be fair and honest. It is not uncommon for a story to not turn out the way the source would have liked.

Sources may say something that moments or days later they don't want to have quoted. While the journalist may, according to the ground rules, be entitled to use it anyway, she/he should first consider what the consequences may be to her/his and the source, and what this will do to her/his future relationship with this source or the source's peers.

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS:[28]

- Identify yourself clearly at the start of the interview.
- Listen carefully. Don't argue with the source. Keep your opinions to yourself.
- Don't be afraid to ask difficult questions – but be courteous.
- Sometimes a source will talk endlessly, offer irrelevant information, promote him/herself, dodge questions, or become belligerent. Be patient. Be persistent. Remain courteous and composed. If necessary, restate the question.
- Look for new questions that may arise from the discussion.
- If any information is not clear, be sure to ask for clarification. Sometimes it is useful to paraphrase for the source so she/he can correct it if necessary.
- End the interview gracefully. Ask the source if you have neglected an important question. Make sure you can call again in case you need to check some information or fill in some gaps.

Types of Sources

Because there are many aspects to HIV/AIDS, the sources of information for stories can be numerous and varied. The following is a useful list of sources organized by general area (human interest, social, health, medical and economic). These categories are by no means exhaustive. For instance, sources listed under "health" can also be good sources of information on the human interest and social aspects of HIV/AIDS:

Human interest:

- People living with HIV/AIDS – men, women, adults, youth, married, single, rich, middle class, poor, rural, urban, migrant, ethnic/racial/tribal majority, minority, workers, students, leaders, advocates, and the common person.
- Families of people with HIV/AIDS – wives, husbands, children, parents, grandparents, spouses, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, dependents, care givers, and heads of household.

Social:

- Community leaders in neighborhoods, villages, towns, and in churches and other religious institutions.

[28] International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), *Getting the Story. Unit 1. The Basics of Professional Journalism: Reporting, Writing and Editing*, (Reston, VA: ICFJ, 1990).

- Activists from human, women's and children's rights groups, and AIDS alliances.

Health:

- Health care providers, such as nurses, doctors, counselors, psychologists, pharmacists, field workers, social workers and traditional health practitioners.
- Social service providers from AIDS service organizations, children's shelters and women's shelters.

Medical/scientific:

- Researchers at universities, non-governmental organizations and medical research institutions.
- Representatives of pharmaceutical companies.

Economic:

- Economists from banks, universities and research institutions.
- Employers and workers from factories, schools, agriculture, and large and small businesses.

Political and judicial:

- Judges, lawyers, legal and policy scholars, law enforcement officials, legal rights advocates, and local, state and national-level politicians.

General background:

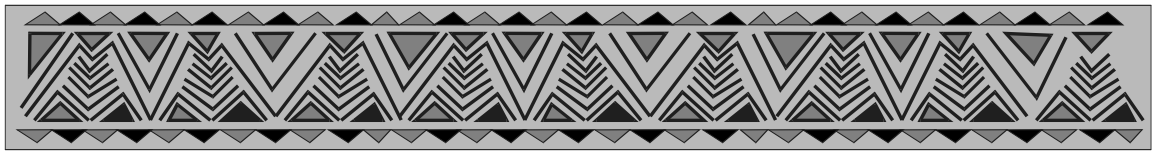
- Libraries can be a very good place to find archived news articles, medical and scientific information, and leads for further information.

A considerable number of institutions can provide sources that cut across several or all of these areas. Obvious examples are United Nations agencies — The United Nations Joint Program on AIDS, UNAIDS, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). There are other United Nations agencies, as well as other international, national, and local organizations that can prove very helpful.

The Internet

For those with access to the Internet, it can be an extremely valuable tool for researching stories. Just as with other sources of information, however, it is crucial that journalists look critically at the websites they are visiting and try to assess the accuracy and reliability of the information. There are some well-established and respected Internet sites that provide information on HIV/AIDS. Some of these are listed as resources at the back of this manual.

As useful as the Internet is, however, it is not enough. As a South African reporter recently said, echoing the sentiments of other journalists, "We should be doing more research, relying less on the Internet and more on going out into the field and meeting the researchers and scientists, the people infected and affected."



Finding New Angles for Reporting on HIV/AIDS

There are many ways to be creative, prepare fresh stories, and give more media attention to HIV/AIDS. Here we provide a few ideas for original ways to cover HIV/AIDS. Many of these are based on the suggestions and experiences that journalists have shared in various forums.[29]

Investigative Journalism and HIV/AIDS

Investigative reporting goes far beyond the typical news story or feature, and it is an area where journalists can make a significant difference in the epidemic. As one frequent reporter on HIV/AIDS put it, "reporters need to be the watchdogs of the public interest."[30] One area where there is a great need for journalists to investigate the issues in depth, she points out, involves "following the money" that foundations, donor agencies, and national governments are committing, in sizable proportions, to fighting HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Angles to investigate include:

- Are the funds getting to the people they are supposed to benefit?
- Are the funds being used effectively?
- Are the funds being used efficiently?

Another area that presents an extraordinary opportunity for investigative journalism involves the goals that governments have set for themselves for combating HIV/AIDS. For example, at the United Nations General Assembly's Special Session on HIV/AIDS in June 2001, 189 member countries approved a Declaration of Commitment. Governments also set goals and timetables for themselves in regional forums and as part of national policy-making processes to fight HIV/AIDS.

Journalists might investigate:

- Are governments implementing their plans?
- Are they implementing their plans on schedule?
- Are countries and communities achieving their objectives? What evidence is there?
- Who benefits from the plan?

[29] These forums include a workshop in Harare in 1999 for journalists attending the International Conference on AIDS in Southern Africa, a workshop in Durban in 2000 for an international group of senior women editors and producers, a session at the international AIDS conference in Durban in 2000, and articles by journalists on HIV/AIDS journalism.

[30] Collins H. (reporter for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*). Personal communication with African Women's Media Center/International Women's Media Foundation, August 15, 2001.

One journalist took several governments to task at once in a story released in Sénégal by the Pan African News Agency:

> "It has now been established that Africa is the continent with the greatest number of people with HIV/AIDS… . The press generally echoes this almost every day… .
>
> "But the fact that African governments are quickest to block or condemn AIDS research rather than to block the spread [of HIV/AIDS] is fairly revealing of the multidimensional character of the war that is taking shape against the disease…whether Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Togo, Malawi or Nigeria, governments are proving to be very strict with anyone who 'pretends' to have discovered a cure or prophylaxis, thus provoking debates that are as sterile as they are long and that often go beyond medical circles.
>
> "The real danger right now is that while the debates grow, the inestimable prevention work done by NGOs and large organizations like UNAIDS runs the risk of being reduced to nothing."

The journalist subsequently cites a number of reliable sources and shows the different sides of the challenges surrounding treatments and prevention of HIV/AIDS, thus laying out new possibilities for governments to change their focus to address the challenges more effectively.

Indigenous Journalism

There are a few journalists who have built a great reputation and secured a large following by deftly using a combination of orthodox journalism skills and story-telling techniques and language that are indigenous to their communities or countries. One of these journalists had a regular column in an English-language newspaper in Swaziland. He wrote about politics and other issues in the news using a mixture of local dialect and English, in the style of an amusing storyteller. When he died prematurely, the whole nation grieved; he had achieved the status of national hero. There are other examples of this kind of indigenous journalism, but there are no written rules and guidelines for it. Yet, when done skillfully and creatively, and honoring both the culture in which it is used and the core values of journalism, it can be very successful.

Women and HIV/AIDS

Perhaps the biggest story of HIV/AIDS in Africa today is the feminization of the epidemic; more women than men have HIV/AIDS in Africa. Women are also becoming infected at a faster rate than are men. The reasons are many. In very general terms, they stem from women's physiological vulnerability to HIV infection, and to gender disparities. Gender inequalities mean that women are less educated and poorer than men, their decision-making and negotiating power is diminished, and they are particularly susceptible to sexual violence and other harmful practices. These same gender disparities are also harmful for men in spite of the fact that they tend to favor men. For example, men are expected to have multiple sexual partners, which increases their risk of contracting (and transmitting) HIV.

Although there has been considerable progress in public health circles about understanding the roles of gender and sexuality in HIV/AIDS, there is still little public awareness and discussion about it. While this is lamentable, it does offer a superb opportunity for journalists to embark on some groundbreaking reporting. Journalists can expose the new face of the epidemic, and explore the many different contributing factors as well as the numerous implications of the feminization of HIV/AIDS.

Story Topic Ideas

Perhaps the most important advice we can offer to journalists is to remember and to understand that HIV/AIDS is not just a health story. HIV/AIDS is also a social, economic, political, and developmental story. Once journalists understand this, they will never run out of HIV/AIDS story ideas. The following story ideas are just a beginning:

- New trends in the HIV/AIDS epidemic:
  - What population groups are being hit the hardest, why, and who is doing what to respond. For example, why more women than men are getting HIV; why young women are several times more likely to get HIV than young men; and the possible solutions.
- Mapping the epidemic:
  - How it is moving from one community to another. For example, how the epidemic is moving along truck routes, between fishing ports, or between mining communities and home.
  - How it is being transmitted.
  - How it could be stopped.
- Gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS:
  - How and why these are linked, and what this linkage means.
  - What changes would be needed to reduce violence and the transmission of HIV/AIDS.
  - Gender-based violence and the criminal justice system.
- Traditional gender roles and relationships and HIV/AIDS:
  - How being a wife puts a woman at risk for HIV/AIDS.
  - How gender affects care for women.
  - How empowering women can prevent HIV/AIDS.
- HIV/AIDS, human rights, and justice:
  - Rights of people with HIV/AIDS and the legal protections for people with HIV/AIDS.
  - How people with HIV/AIDS are treated and how they should be treated.
  - International conventions/plans of action related to human rights, reproductive health, gender equality, children's rights, etc. – and the status of their implementation.
- Adolescents or young adults and their risk for HIV/AIDS.
- The impact of HIV/AIDS on different sectors of the economy:
  - For example, its impact on different businesses, industries, agriculture.
  - What this impact means for economic and social development.
- Sex work:
  - What health services and governments are doing – or could do – to make sex work safer for workers, clients, and their families.
  - Programs for sex workers and their clients – what works and what doesn't; examples of empowered sex workers and leaders in the workers' communities.
  - Economic conditions and gender disparities that fuel the sex industry.
  - Viable economic alternatives to sex work (e.g., micro-credit programs).
- The impact of HIV/AIDS on schools and universities:
  - The impact on teachers and students.
  - The role of teachers in overcoming the epidemic; examples of what is being done.
- The impact of HIV/AIDS on family structures and relationships.
- HIV/AIDS and children:
  - Maternal transmission of HIV and its prevention.

- AIDS orphans – the extent of the problem and the impact on older generations.
- The changing roles of older generations in the face of HIV/AIDS.
- Strategies to care for AIDS orphans and others affected by HIV/AIDS.

- The response of the religious community to HIV/AIDS.
- Treatment and care of people with HIV/AIDS:
  - AIDS therapies/medicines.
  - Government policy.
  - Costs, challenges surrounding AIDS therapies.
- Research into an HIV/AIDS vaccine and microbicide.

KEEPING TABS ON MEDIA COVERAGE

Exercise: Develop an archive of media coverage on HIV/AIDS to keep tables of stories that have been done, and on all those that have yet to be covered. Cross-reference the stories that haven't been covered with those that interest your audience to create a potential story list.

Sensationalism

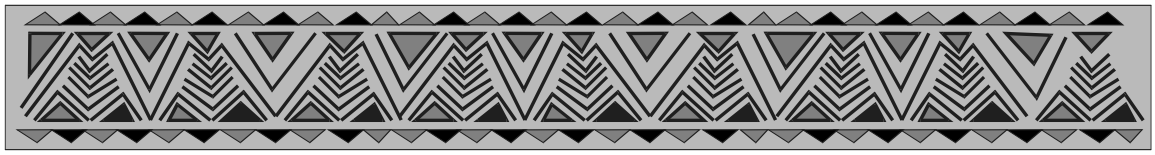
It is probably clear by now that sensationalist coverage of HIV/AIDS is damaging and unnecessary. Not only does it impede efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS and to care for people affected by HIV/AIDS, it also does little to earn professional respect for the journalist.

- Sensationalism is not necessary to sell a story on HIV/AIDS. Sensationalism is an easy way out for a journalist who does not know how to prepare a piece that can sell based on its merits as a timely, relevant, well-written (or narrated), original story. Rather than sensationalism, what is necessary for a story to sell is the application of the elements of good journalism and a new story idea or angle.
- Report the facts, but don't just dwell on the negative. Report on the possibilities, on successful interventions. Morbid and sensational language (for example, a headline like "Sex thrills and AIDS kills") in the long term drives away audiences, according to any number of editors.[31] It leads to fears and prejudices and feelings of hopelessness, which fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS and make life for those with HIV/AIDS (and people close to them) especially difficult and painful.
- To write accurately and dispassionately about HIV/AIDS and related issues, such as sexual violence, the journalist needs to understand the nature of the problem.
- Remember that HIV/AIDS and its contexts are not entertainment.

Using other outlets to get the word out

Good stories can have more than one use, and experience has shown that there is a great demand for compilations of media articles (and transcripts of broadcasts) on a specific issue. For example, booklets of reprinted articles from a group of journalists reporting on different aspects of an issue can be widely disseminated and can ensure that the articles have a longer "shelf-life."

[31] For example, Alfred Ntonga of *The Nation* in Malawi, and participants at a regional workshop for media managers at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, in 1998. See Mukwita A., 1998 and 1999.



"Selling" the Story to Editors

One of the greatest challenges in covering HIV/AIDS issues is selling story ideas to the gatekeepers, or the editors and senior producers who decide which stories make it and which don't, and which should get prominent space or airtime.

Editorial decision-makers can present formidable obstacles to prominent, in-depth, and regular coverage of HIV/AIDS – or any sort of coverage of HIV/AIDS. Journalists eager to publish or broadcast stories on HIV/AIDS describe these barriers imposed by their bosses, including editors, producers, publishers, owners, and others making editorial decisions:

- Editors are tired of covering AIDS. They say that they have "been there, done that," and that it is not news any more. They may be under the impression that their audience is already adequately informed about HIV/AIDS.
- There can be stiff competition for print space or airtime, making it difficult to slot in substantial stories on HIV/AIDS, or to do so on a regular basis.

Here are some of the biggest barriers that journalists face when trying to cover areas such as women and HIV/AIDS. These simple strategies have been used successfully by journalists from different regions of the world.[32]

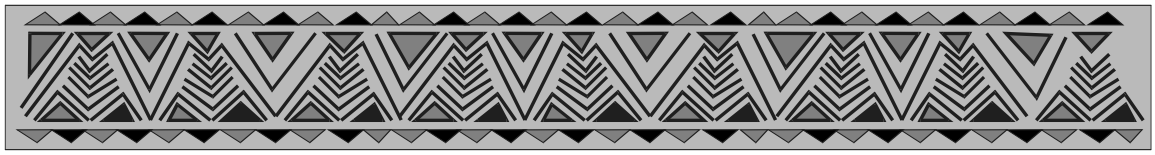
Editorial Barriers	**Strategies for Leaping Over the Obstacles**
Editors, managers and even journalism school faculty consider topics dealing with health and "women's issues" "soft," and not newsworthy.	General strategy: Package the stories well. Be creative. A brilliant story about a topic that may have sounded dull to an editor will sell. Find a new hook/peg for the story. Link the HIV/AIDS story with some current event(s) or with policy/politics. Delve into the topic, and cover it in greater depth than has been done before. Use allies, or informal channels, to get approval, or at least support, for broadcasting or publishing the story. Work with information sources, such as non-governmental organizations, to get useful and timely information on a regular basis. Plan stories for idle news days when they are more likely to get print space or airtime. Write or produce media analyses of coverage of HIV/AIDS and of women and HIV/AIDS and publish or broadcast these

[32] These ideas have been culled from: the members of a group of senior women editors and producers from 10 countries who meet twice a year to explore different health, population, and women's issues; journalists speaking at the international AIDS conference in Durban in 2000; and various journalists writing about media coverage of HIV/AIDS.

	in the mainstream media and in respected trade publications. These will inspire and open the eyes of editors, managers, and reporters to the importance of HIV/AIDS coverage and the opportunities it presents.
The gatekeepers think that HIV/AIDS is an old story.	HIV/AIDS is no more an old story than politics is a tired story. Investigate the myriad aspects of women and HIV/AIDS. Take a different approach to reporting on HIV/AIDS. Traditionally, coverage of HIV/AIDS has been sensationalist, alarmist, and gloomy. Change this. Look at promising initiatives, success stories, acts of courage, and people who are making positive change. In preparing or proposing a story, think about and then show how this particular aspect of HIV/AIDS is newsworthy. Identify what is new, such as discoveries in research on HIV/AIDS, the latest data on rates of infection, new data on infection rates among different population groups, developments in how programs are fighting HIV/AIDS, social changes brought about by HIV/AIDS, progress in the pharmaceutical industry.
Male-dominated media are not interested in the topic, or in women's aspects of HIV/AIDS.	Do research to find out who is in an audience, including its information needs and interests. Show editors and managers that women are an important audience and that they are interested in these kinds of stories. Propose stories with diplomacy and tact, but stay firm and calm, and maintain resolve. Find allies in the media organization. Engage their support. Use informal channels and networks to get stories approved, or at least to garner support for them.
Certain aspects of HIV/AIDS and of women and HIV/AIDS, including some of the language, may be culturally shocking.	Survey audiences to find out what they are really interested in, and what they are willing to hear or read.
Editors and managers – possibly reflecting an important segment of the public – may be afraid to deal with a particular issue.	When covering a controversial issue, or a harmful practice that is traditional, listen to all sides. Make sure the coverage is balanced. Find allies and pioneers in the community who will speak about the issue. Use ethics, judgment and common sense as a guide. Use non-judgmental, clear, concise language. Use the terms recommended by those working in the HIV/AIDS field.

Women in management or senior editorial positions may be overly cautious about giving space or time to stories that may appear to be focused on "women's issues."	For a story focusing on what could be considered "women's issues," show the connection with another "hard" issue(s). For example, explain and illustrate the impact on the family structure and dynamics, on the greater community, on education and labor, and on business policy. Using the latest data, show the editors that in Africa, more women than men have HIV/AIDS.
There is a lack of coordination between editors and reporters so stories fall by the wayside. Editors and managers have a formula that works for them in making editorial decisions, and new HIV/AIDS stories may not appear to fit into that formula.	Open and maintain lines of communication with editors and managers. Discuss plans to prepare an HIV/AIDS story early enough for the editors to include it in a line-up. Find a news angle that will justify using the story.

The first suggestion presented in the above table will help journalists overcome just about any barrier. As seasoned journalists advise, packaging a story well – giving it a good news angle, making it relevant, being original, using clear and lively language, providing accurate and timely facts, putting a human face on it – is the best strategy.



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