

Fighting HIV/AIDS through Strategic Communications

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Through an innovative design of bringing together two separate target audiences the World Bank Institute (WBI) launched parallel courses in June via distance learning on "Fighting the HIV/AIDS Pandemic through Information and Strategic Communication: An Integrated Training Course for Program Teams and Journalists." The courses are offered to five African countries: Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, through the Global Distance Learning Network.

The courses are run jointly for the first two sessions, and thereafter separately, until they rejoin for the last session in October. In between, participants will have worked on their communications strategies and supporting media articles in-country. Facilitated face-to-face workshops will be held for teams in Malawi and Uganda.

The course is helping NGOs and ministries incorporate elements of effective communication into their programs, such as public service messages broadcast over radio, television, and in print media. WBI is assisting media professionals in covering HIV/AIDS not simply as a health problem but as a threat to all their countries' development objectives.

The Institute is also working with members of local communities, civil society, the media, and government, on finding ways to combat the persistent stigma attached to those suffering from HIV/AIDS. HIV is sometimes referred to as the "silence virus" because of a virtual censorship on speaking openly about the virus. This is a deadly silence. It has crippled previous attempts to help people understand HIV/AIDS and how to shield themselves from contracting HIV.

"In a situation where there is neither a vaccine nor a cure, the role of communication is very important. Effective communication and correct information can help more people avoid the devastating effects of this disease," said **Timothy Carrington**, who manages WBI courses for media professionals.



"The participants are now equipped for their work as journalists covering HIV/AIDS, not as a health issue but as a development crisis," said one of the facilitators in Abuja, Nigeria. "They actually understood the message which will be useful for them in their future editorial functions."



Obadiah Tohomdet, External Affairs Officer at the Nigeria Country Office in Abuja observed: "I noticed that behavioral change and crafting of "take away" messages were well understood by the participants in the Strategic Communications course. This shows that the resource persons did their work very well."

Future courses are planned for South Asia in the autumn, and Eastern and Central Europe during the winter.