



## TV soap operas in HIV education

### Reaching out with popular entertainment

#### The Context

Ignorance, fear, stigma and discrimination, and gender inequality block the road towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care. Unblocking the road requires educating masses of people and changing their attitudes and behaviour, but that is not so easy. Many young people underestimate their vulnerability to harm and resist attempts to warn them about risky and irresponsible behaviour. Due to illiteracy, beliefs or simple lack of interest, many older people do not take advantage of HIV-related information provided in conventional forms even when it is readily available.

Most people in most countries watch TV. If they do not have TV sets at home, they watch in communal spaces. Worldwide, soap operas are among the most popular of all TV programmes. They attract many times more viewers than purely educational programmes and yet they, too, have huge potential to educate. Given that they tell stories about the universal comedies and tragedies of daily life, they are perfect vehicles for shedding light on all of the issues surrounding HIV and causing people to reflect on the implications for them and the people they love.



This poster tells people "Love as a Test" is not just about HIV. It is a love story starring one of Kyrgyzstan's most popular male actors.

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#### Germany's support for soap operas

Germany is strongly committed to the drive towards universal access and supports behaviour change communications (BCC), often associated with social marketing of condoms. German Financial Cooperation – delivered through the KfW Entwicklungsbank (Development Bank, KfW) – supports social marketing in 30 developing countries. German Technical Cooperation – delivered through the German International Cooperation Agency, GIZ (formerly German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), German Development Service (DED) and Capacity Building International (InWEnt)) – provides technical advice, expert workers and training to a wide range of programmes that address HIV and related issues, and these often have BCC components. This publication looks at cases where those components include soap operas.

#### German HIV Practice Collection

Publications in this Collection describe programmes supported by German Development Cooperation that have been assessed as "promising or good practice" by an editorial board of experts from German development organizations and by two international peer reviewers with renowned expertise in the particular field.

Each publication tells the story – in plain language – of how a particular approach has been implemented in one or more countries, making it accessible to more than just experts in the field. Each one is published in a short (four-page) and full version, often with links to related tools and reading at [www.german-practice-collection.org](http://www.german-practice-collection.org).

The Collection aims to stimulate dialogue, so please visit this website and tell us what you think.

Managing Editor ([ghpc@giz.de](mailto:ghpc@giz.de))

Peer-reviewed

In "Love as a Test", Adyl's older sister knows he used to inject drugs but does not know he has just tested HIV positive and wonders what is troubling him.

## "Love as a Test" in Kyrgyzstan

### Responding to HIV concentrated among injecting drug users

With 5.3 million people, Kyrgyzstan has an estimated 50,000 to 81,000 injecting drug users (IDUs) and 4,200 people living with HIV. At present, three-quarters of all people living with HIV are IDUs. Most IDUs are young males but HIV could soon spread through their sexual partners into the general population.

In 2002, the UNDP Joint Programme on the Expanded Response to HIV/AIDS in Kyrgyzstan (UNDP JP) agreed to develop mass media strategies for prevention of HIV. With the help of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and a DED media specialist, they began with extensive research. It found that TV was by far the most popular source of HIV "information" for people of all ages but that it was mostly misinformation. That is, it played on people's fears, blamed IDUs and sex workers, and encouraged stigma and discrimination against everyone living with HIV.

Relying heavily on volunteers, the partners were able to produce four 52-minute episodes of a soap opera for around US\$100,000. Steps included a workshop training local writers in the art of script writing; a competition for the best script; training and support for the winners as they developed the script further; training and support for production crew and caste and for marketing and distribution. InWEnt provided expert trainers including one of the creators of "Lindenstrasse", Germany's longest-running and most popular TV soap opera.

Experts in HIV and BCC were part of the creative team. The entire team agreed to cast a popular male actor as the main character, Adyl, and to portray him in a sympathetic but realistic way, as a young student who had once been an IDU and, years later, learned he was infected with HIV. The chosen title, "Love as a Test", captures the essence of the resulting soap opera. Everyone's love for Adyl and his love for them are put to a test as they all learn to adjust to the facts that he used to be an IDU and is now HIV-positive.



### Impact on target audiences

The Russian-language version was first broadcast in February 2006 and the Kyrgyz-language version later that year. Since then, both versions (and a film version) have been shown repeatedly on TV and in education settings throughout Central Asia. A 2007 evaluation found that 17 percent of people in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital and only major city, and 41 and 49 percent of people in two villages had seen it. On a scale of 0 (worst) to 3 (best), adolescents and young adults gave it an average score of 2.7 for usefulness. They and others said it had shown the levels of stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV, shown "this could happen to me or people close to me" and caused them to examine their own attitudes and behaviour.

## "Amor de Batey" in Dominican Republic

### Responding to high HIV rates among ethnic Haitians

With 9.8 million people, the Dominican Republic has HIV rates of 0.8 percent among all adults (15-49) but 3.2 percent among adults who live in bateys. Informal settlements on sugar plantations, bateys are occupied mainly by ethnic Haitians. Desperately poor, they often have little or no formal education or knowledge about HIV.

In 2005, the Pan Caribbean Partnership against AIDS (PANCAP) launched Caribbean Social Marketing to Prevent HIV and AIDS (CARISMA) and Germany, through KfW, became a financial partner. In Dominican Republic, CARISMA is administered by the country office of Population Service International (PSI). Under CARISMA, the Pro-Batey Coalition of several NGOs implements the Bateyes Programme. In 2006, it launched production of five 20-minute episodes of a soap opera and took research and development steps broadly similar to those outlined for "Love as a Test".

The resulting soap opera, "Amor de Batey", tells the story of Lucy. Raped in her teens, she is now a single mother who dates an older man called Pedro. Married, Pedro is as

In "Amor de Batey", Lucy finds new purpose in life and returns to school after joining a support group for people living with HIV.

unfaithful to Lucy as he is to his wife but he and Lucy share the common prejudice that "real men" do not wear condoms and "real women" trust their men and don't require condoms. As a result, both Pedro and Lucy become infected with HIV. He goes to a sorcerer for "cures", continues to behave as before and eventually dies of AIDS. Encouraged by a peer counsellor, Lucy joins a support group for people living with HIV, gets a new lease on life and goes to classes where she learns to read and write.

#### Impact on target audiences

First broadcast countrywide in July 2007, "Amor de Batey" was broadcast for the third time in November 2008. After the second broadcast, a survey found that 27 percent of Batey residents had seen it and, of those, 43 percent had seen it two or more times. While there has been no formal assessment of its impacts, PSI credits it with increased sales of the low-cost but reliable *Pantè* condoms distributed by CARISMA. PSI also reports that NGOs working in bateys are finding that a 12-chapter educational version and related BCC guide provide them with the tools they need for successful group counselling and for education and training in classrooms, meetings and workshops.

### "SIDA dans la Cité" in Côte d'Ivoire

#### Responding to a generalized HIV epidemic

With 19.3 million people, Côte d'Ivoire has HIV prevalence rates of 6.4 percent among women (15-49) and 2.7 percent among men (15-49). Contributing factors include multiple and concurrent sexual relationships where women are often much younger than their male partners and have little knowledge about HIV and how to prevent it. However, it is wealthier, better educated women with more knowledge about HIV who take the most risks and they often fail to use condoms even though they know they should.

At first in partnership with PSI and now on its own, the Agence Ivoirienne de Marketing Social (AIMAS) has been running the Côte d'Ivoire Social Marketing Programme since 1991. Germany, through KfW, has been a financial partner since 1996. In 1994, the programme launched production of eleven 15-minute episodes which together with debates and condom ads filled half-hour television slots.



First broadcast in 1995, "SIDA dans la Cité" soon became the most popular television programme in Côte d'Ivoire and a hit throughout francophone West and Central Africa. The Burkina Faso Social Marketing Program joined in partnership to produce a second series of twenty 26-minute episodes, first broadcast in late 1996/early 1997. A third series with 16 episodes was broadcast in 2004.

Broadcast repeatedly throughout francophone West and Central Africa and often used in education settings, the three series of "SIDA dans la Cité" now cover a broad range of situations, attitudes and behaviours likely to result in HIV infection or to stop people from getting tested and treated.

#### Impact on target audiences

An evaluation of the second series of "SIDA dans la Cité" surveyed adults in a selection of communities with electricity (and, therefore, access to TV) and found that 68 percent of women and 62 percent of men had watched at least one episode; 42 percent of women and 27 percent of men had watched ten or more episodes. The most frequent watchers were wealthier and better educated young adults who often engaged in high-risk sex. The greatest impacts, in terms of increased use of condoms during high-risk sex, were on those who watched the most episodes and, in those same terms, its impacts on men were far greater than on women.

### Lessons learned

- **Know your epidemic.** To know who is at risk, where they live and the attitudes and behaviours that put them at risk is to know your target audience and the messages you need to get through to them.
- **Make it professional.** Effective "edutainment" puts special demands on a creative team. Most of the team should be country nationals, but it is vitally important that members include experts in soap opera production and also experts in HIV and education.





- **Make it local and realistic.** The target audience should be able recognize and identify with the characters and to put themselves in the situations portrayed in a soap opera. As they watch they should be thinking, “This could be happening to me and people I know.”
- **Take care in developing supplementary material.** Burdening a soap opera with too much information will destroy its capacity to hold and engage viewers. At the same time, it can predispose them to want to learn more. Possibilities include information spots to go with each episode, supplements in newspapers during the broadcast period, and teaching guides for use in education settings.
- **Anticipate bi-products.** Edited and repacked as a feature film or the chapters of an educational DVD, a series of television soap operas can be put to other uses. It is best to anticipate these during the production process. It may be appropriate, for example, to extend some scenes with more material for an educational DVD but to leave that material out of the broadcast version.
- **Anticipate the need to evaluate impacts.** Consider, for example, surveys and focus groups discussions before and after broadcasts in order to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.
- **Sustain the effort.** Successful HIV prevention requires a continual stream of HIV information and BCC. Rebroadcast of old episodes and broadcast of new episodes can be effective ways of reminding people of key messages (e.g., always carry condoms in your wallet or purse) and keeping those messages current with changing lifestyles and emerging situations.

The third series of “SIDA dans la Cité” tells four stories of four episodes each. One is about Fatoumata, who learns she is HIV positive when she is pregnant.

## Peer Review

The editorial board of the German HIV Practice Collection and two external reviewers have found all three soap opera projects to be worthy of inclusion in a publication for the Collection. Applying the eight criteria for inclusion they have found the three projects to be **effective, transferable, participatory and empowering, gender aware, innovative, cost-effective, and sustainable**. They felt, however, that all three were weak on **quality of monitoring and evaluation** and underscored one of the lessons learned and described above: anticipate the need to evaluate impacts.

## Would you like to know more?

This is a summary of a longer publication. If you would like to see the full version or if you are interested in other publications in the German HIV Practice collection, please go to [www.german-practice-collection.org](http://www.german-practice-collection.org). Alternatively, you can order printed copies of this short version by emailing [ghpc@giz.de](mailto:ghpc@giz.de).

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GHPC Secretariat run by the Project  
‘Strengthening the German contribution  
to the global AIDS response’  
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Eschborn: May 2009 (this edition  
January 2011)