Role of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) for HIV/AIDS

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Abstract

Today it is impossible to think of life without communication. Human history has passed through different stages of evolution, but the present era is being described as the age of communication. Though communication is as old as human history itself, what is remarkable about the present age is the revolutionary changes in the mode of communication. There is no doubt that human communication consisting of exchange of information existed from the dawn of human civilization. Since then, the method of gathering information and the mode of transmitting the same from place to place and person to person have undergone remarkable changes. Scientific and technological advancement have also made it possible to improve methods of preserving vast quantities of information for use as and when we need them. Today what is being described as the communication revolution deals primarily with Information, Communication Technology (1CT). It affects the way we deal with data and information in three important areas: (a) gathering, (b) transmission (c) storage. The aim of the present research paper is to study the role of Information, Education and Communication for HIV/AIDS.

Keywords: symbols, language, memory, speech, signs and sender

1. Communication

Communication is integral to every mode of existence. All living beings have different ways of communication which enable them to relate with their environment. Communication profoundly influences their life, growth, and mutual interaction.

1.1 Communication — An Essential Human Need

Human beings live in society. One of the essential prerequisites of social existence is to communicate. A person's ability to communicate effectively with other persons forms an integral part of the individual's identity and success. It may be expressed in speech, using language, signs and symbols or electronic impulses. Human language is the most important means of communication. Human thought can be expressed with a certain degree of accuracy with the help of languages. One of the major differences between animals and human beings is the latter's ability to use symbols and language.

Human communication is not limited to words alone, but includes the whole body: eyes, hands,

the senses and other organs. All of these assist the communication process. Human action, which we call body language, and behaviour like smiling, waving, embracing are forms of communication. In fact, some authors say that all behaviour is communication because there is no time or moment in our life when we cease to communicate.

We may divide human communication into two parts:

i) Direct or Natural Communication

ii) Indirect or Technological Communication

Communication is direct or natural if it is achieved without the help of any instrument other than the human faculties. Language, faculties of speech, body language, symbols using the bodily organs etc. facilitate direct or natural communication. This kind of communication is limited by time and space. A voice has to be heard; a sign has to be seen. These call for certain proximity or nearness between the two participants in the communication process, the sender and the receiver(s).

Indirect or technological communication, on the other hand, uses technology developed by science. Indirect communication may be between people who are communication for HIV far away in time and space. It may be with known persons or with strangers.

1.2 Elements of Communication

Human communication is a complex process. Rajesh, a student, meets his teacher in the morning. He greets the teacher with folded hands and says: "Good morning, Sir". The teacher responds with the words, "Hello Rajesh" and nods his head.

Though the above communication relates to a simple exchange of greeting, there are several elements in this action. The two have a common understanding in their mind of the meaning of the words "Good Morning" as a verbal expression of greeting, and the gesture of folded hands as a sign of respect. Similarly, Rajesh and the teacher have a shared belief that the reply given by the teacher is also a sign of acknowledgement and appreciation for the greeting. In other words, both the one who greets and the one who is greeted have a common notion of the meaning of the words and gestures, their appropriateness and significance.

The sign of folded hands, greeting one's teacher etc. have cultural significance as well. Folded hands are a sign of respect in India. The greeting also establishes the social relationship between the two categories of persons — student and teacher.

1.3 Symbols, Language, Memory

Meaning the earliest forms of communication in all probability were confined to signs. Just as an infant needs to communicate and be communicated to for his / her survival and sustenance, primitive people needed to communicate. Hence, they adopted various means to communicate from one to another, from one-to-many others, from one group to another group and so on. Sound signals through mouth, (verbal) gestures (non-verbal), sound signals by beating of drums (instrumental), fire and smoke signals (symbol, sign) were some of the primitive efforts toward communication.

Then came the development of language. Language is the communication of thoughts and emotions by means of a structured system of symbols. Symbols are words both written and spoken and the ability to use the symbols defines language skills.

Three major functions of language:

Language serves primarily as a vehicle for communication.

It reflects both the personality of the individual and the culture of his / her society. In turn it helps shape both personality and culture.

Language makes possible the growth and transmission of culture, the continuity of societies, and the effective functioning and control of social groups.

In other words, language is a system of symbols — oral and written used by members of a social community in a fairly standardized way to call forth meaning. Human beings live in a world of symbols. In one form or another, symbols are always overt; they must be seen, heard, felt, or smelt. They condense abstractions into delimited objects. Paralanguage is evolved as yet another means of communication through spoken words. It is a language alongside of language and includes vocal characteristics such as pitch, range, resonance, tempo and quality,

We cannot imitate receive, or interpret an act of communication using symbols, language or paralanguage unless we have an adequately functioning memory from which be draw

meanings. Meaning is not transmitted by the Sender, it is deducted by the receiver on the basis of the words, symbols, context, tone, etc. Association, attribution and interpretation are some of the steps in the process of communication. Memory is essential to this process.

1.4 Some Basic Principles of Communication

1) The purpose of communication is to enable a Receiver to understand a message presented by a Sender in a way that substantially corresponds with the interest of the Sender.

2) What is understood is at least as dependent on how the Receiver perceives the message as on how the sender presents it.

3) The sender presents messages via cultural forms (Symbols which create within the Receiver meanings which he or she shapes into message). That is to say, in communication, only messages are transmitted. Meanings are perceived (rested by those who receive them).

4) It communicates effectively, the Receiver and Sender must be on the same Wavelength. The Sender must be Receiver-oriented.

5) If the Sender's message is to influence the Receiver, it must be presented with the appropriate degree of impact.

6) The most effective communication results from person-to-person communication (interaction) or inter-personal communication.

7) Communication is most effective when the Sender, Message and Recipient participate in the same context, setting, and frame of reference.

8) Communication is most effective when the Sender has earned credibility as a respectful human being within the chosen frame of reference.

9) Communication is most effective when the message is understood by the Receiver which relates specifically to life as he or she lives it, and it is grasped with least effort by the Receiver.

10) Communication is most effective when the Receiver discerns an ability to identify at least partially, with the Communicator and the relevance of the message to his /her own life.

2. Functions of Communication

Considering the role of communication, we can distinguish two functions in the way we communicate, namely, psychological aspects and socio-cultural aspects.

2.1 Psychological Aspects of Communication

The first step in any human communication is a person's ability to choose signs and symbols and use them. Here communication is seen as a tool which enables a person to establish contact with the outside world. A child begins his / her first lessons on how to communicate from his / her environment — the people who surround it, his / her mother and father, brothers and sisters, other family members and neighbours. He/ she learns to progress in his / her interaction with the environment through crying and laughing, making known his / her needs and demands, shouting, showing his / her approval and disapproval, joy and pain, fear and loneliness. But the external communication that a person manifest must originate within the individual. It is this inner psychological capacity that enables a person to organize, develop and nurture his or her life that leads to communication with the outside world. Hence, we may distinguish two aspects in the psychology of human communication — the one stemming from within the person, the other which enables him or her to interact with the outside world as a receiver or participant of the process of communication. Both are essential to the process of communication. Communication, in this sense, involves the individual and flows from the core of a person's being. Any communication reveals something about the self of the communicator, about his or her relation to the receiver, and the intention or purpose of the communication.

2.2 Socio-Cultural Aspect of Communication

The function of communication cannot be viewed without considering the social and cultural elements that constitute communication. The function of communication in society and culture can be explained with the example of a housewife going to the market. Her first activity is to see what is available in what quality and for what price. She will then compare the prices and the quality of the goods and interpret to herself this situation. Finally, she makes a decision to buy. She might also pass on this knowledge to other members of her family or neighbourhood.

The whole process of social interaction involving the visit to the market, the discussion, buying and passing on the information to others serve as a kind of recreation or entertainment for the housewife.

2.3 Lasswell's Classification

Harold Lasswell has identified four functions of communication in human society and culture.

Though they refer more to Mass Communication, they are applicable to all kinds of human communication. They are:

a) Surveillance of the Environment: It includes gathering intelligence. Media keeps watch on events and people. They inform us of what we need to know. Wibur Schramm observed that media functions as a watchman. We ask media to serve as our "informers", to be our ears and eyes, sometimes our voices. We count on them to survey our environment and report to us. We use the information to form our attitudes, shape our opinions and take decisions. In the above example, the housewife looks for the various shops selling the same goods, compares the quality and price. She seeks information prior to making up her mind on decisions related to buying.

b) Correlating or interpreting the information which one gathers. We not only interpret what has happened but analyse why it happened. We explore its benefits and dangers. We explain and comment on an event. This constitutes the basis for public opinion and education of the audience. In the above example, the housewife correlates the different parts of society in response to the environment. Based on the information gathered the housewife interprets the findings and makes a decision.

c) Transmission of social heritage within and from one generation to the next, which means 'socialization'. Media provide a common frame of reference. De Vito explains this function of media as teacher and educator. It teaches us ways of behaviour and helps shape social attitudes and political decisions. The role of media in socialization and transmission of social heritage has become essential today. The housewife passes on her insights, information and experiences to others.

d) Entertainment: The mass media of today are predominantly entertainment Importance and Relevance of Information, Education and media. Entertainment has become a major element of modem mass media, especially television. Often even programmes with educational components have entertainment built into it. The popular perception of mass media is that they are meant to be for entertainment. Mass media provide momentary escape from reality (films in India are called 'Canned Dreams'). One communicates

to enjoy the dealings and movements in and beyond society, e.g., play, sports and games, music, variety shows, drama etc.

e) Persuasion: One of the important functions of communication is to influence others. Media exert a powerful impact on society. They persuade the public, I influence their attitudes, and help change their behaviour. Communication can persuade people to change from traditional to modem methods, replace old habits, customs and ways of doing things. It is not always easy to draw the line between informing and influencing as the process is somewhat unconscious.

Schraw and Porter have given different interpretations to the social functions of communication from which we can draw an overview of societal functions of communication viewed from the political, economic and social systems. Other authors have summed up the functions of communication as: information, interpretation and entertainment. They maintain that interpretation is an inherent part of transferring information from one to the other.

3. Information

Information gathering is a complex activity which ranges from verbal, person to person exchange of information and testimony of others to use of electronic equipment. Communication technology has revolutionized the process of data gathering. Scientific development has also accelerated the speed of disseminating data. Information can move from place to place and person to person today in a way that would have been unimaginable a few decades or a century ago. Today transmission of information has become quicker and sometimes instantaneous. It is important to preserve data for future use or for onward transmission, for documentation to facilitate research. Though news and information today appear to be transitory and highly perishable, it is important that they are preserved. Developments in communication technology has made it possible today to store vast quantities of data using the computer chip and compact disc. The Internet itself began as a tool to safeguard and preserve defence related data. The process has made gigantic strides, and it is possible to preserve data with remarkable accuracy and durability for further use. It may be rated that all the three components of information we have mentioned above are inter-related, and they enhance each

other in making information available, accessible and durable.

3.1 The Way Information is Spread

Information is the essential core of communication. We cannot communicate unless we have common, objective data at our disposal. Information is spread through a multistage flow — by the media, by people who have heard the message from the media, and by people who have heard it only from other people. The time by which the information reaches the population depends on many factors, including the importance of the information, the number of repetitions of the message and the degree to which the original receivers of the message pass it on to others. The flow of information after the assassination of American President John F. Kennedy provided a dramatic example of the role person-to-person. Communication can play in the diffusion of information, especially if that inflammation is of immense importance. Almost half the American population heard about the assassination from other people, and not from the media. Then, after hearing about it by word of mouth, they rushed to the media for confirmation and further information. We may compare this with the bombing of the twin towers in USA on September 11, 2001 or the tsunami disaster that struck Asia on December 20, 2004. The world watched for days on television these events and their fallout.

3.2 Information is a Commodity and a State of Mind

Information is becoming more and more a commodity that is marketed, something that has a price attached to it. The three above-mentioned processes, namely, gathering, dissemination and storage, involve expenses and human resources. Newsgathering is a highly organized and developed art which calls for long distant travel or expensive communication technology and a person who actually monitors and guides the process. With thousands of newspapers, radio and television channels vying with one another to gather information quickly and accurately about events in the world, there is intense competition. Time is an important criterion, and information that is not timely is considered irrelevant. "To be first and to be fast" is the aim of most reporters in the field whose duty it is to monitor events in their area and report them. The more global, better organized and financially sound media organizations spend huge sums of money, employ the most talented persons and latest equipment in newsgathering. The information thus gathered is sold to others: news agencies or newspapers and periodicals. Columnists have syndicated columns, television and radio programmes are bought and sold.

Information that can result in generating greater profit and not necessarily the most relevant information, is considered desirable by media that have become major financial concerns. That is why the Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal was rated the most important media event in America in 1998. It had all the ingredients of a mega event, and it fetched huge profits. Media continues to create information around celebrities and mega events: Princess Diana, Mike Tyson, Sachin Tendulkar, Olympics, World Cup events etc.

Information is also a state of mind as it involves the choice, selection, omission, interpretation and other processes of distilling, colouring, all of which are the work of some person with creativity. The media neither collects nor disseminates all the information that the audience require to know. The decision to choose, reject or distil information is the result of several factors along the process.

3.3 Imbalance in Information Sharing, Technology, Instruments of Sharing Information

There is a serious imbalance in the availability and distribution of information between the developed countries of the Northem hemisphere and the poorer countries of the South. The imbalance exists also in the ownership and control of technology and instruments of communication electricity, telephones, radio, printing equipment, television, newspapers etc. The continent of Africa which has about 10 per cent of the world's population has only 1 per cent of the world's daily newspapers, 1 per cent of the world's books, 2 per cent of the world's radios. North America by comparison has only 7.5 per cent of the world's population, but has 16 per cent of the newspapers, 44 per cent of radios and 15 per cent of books. Not only is there lack of information available to the poor countries, but also lack technology which will enable them to access information which is vital for their survival and development. The glaring imbalance is evident when we analyse the Indian scenario too. Most of the rural poor cannot afford television, radio or newspapers. They do not have access to the various modem

means of communication. They continue to be "information poor" while the rich and powerful in the urban areas elsewhere become "information rich".

The glaring global imbalance in communication and information was highlighted in the UNESCO-commissioned study called the McBride Report. The study has urged the need for striving toward a "New World Information and Communication Order" (NWICO).

3.4 Information and Government: Control and Power

Importance and Relevance of Information, Education and the above factors related to information are subject to political systems that allows Communication (IEC) for HIV free flow of information or thwart the process through censorship and control. Countries with dictatorial governments and political powers that follow totalitarian regimes interfere with free speech and expression. In all countries, however, democratic or enlightened they may claim to be, there are different forms of control. In some countries, the media information is state-owned or controlled. Information is power and those who want to perpetuate power are unwilling to allow media to function independently and objectively.

Today global media networks controlled by multinationals have also become centres of power and control. They hamper the free flow of information. The legitimate guardians of freedom of expression, should be the people. Any form of control that interferes with the rights of people to express themselves freely and exchange information, should be opposed. An enlightened democracy is not possible without an independent and free media that can ensure that information percolates to the masses undiluted.

3.5 Information and Formation of Public Opinion

In a democracy media helps to shape public opinion. Information enables the citizens to make informed decisions, which will affect the quality of political processes like the elections, functioning of the government and its organs. A free press can bring to light abuse of power and national wealth. Information helps people to participate in the functioning of society and social institutions. Information can help the effective functioning of legislature, executive and judiciary. It is for this reason that the press is called the Fourth Estate. All media have a social responsibility.

3.6 Information and Social Change

Many sociological analyses have been done to measure the impact of information on society and social change. Media have been used in order to disseminate information pertaining to agriculture, health, scientific temper and progressive mentality in the people. Information enables people to advance from superstitious practices. The print media played an important role in the freedom struggle, and for the promotion of democratic principles. The first use of television in the country was to impart information to the rural communities through Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE). Information through media have helped to bring about change in social attitudes in India, especially in the area of removing untouchability, eradication of illiteracy, child marriage, population control, participation in the election process., vaccination etc.

3.7 'Information Rich' and 'Information Poor'

The expressions 'information rich' and 'information poor' describe the existence of serious imbalance among various countries, and within a given country. There is glaring disparity in the way information is distributed. The information rich have immediate access to various forms of media while the information poor, who are also often the economically. Poor, lack proper access to any source of information. The McBride report and subsequent studies have underscored the need to end the monopoly of information and create a more congenial atmosphere for everyone to be able to benefit by the information which affects the people concerned.

3.8 Information and Truth

We cannot forget to ignore the paramount importance of truth in the way information is gathered, distributed or preserved. In the face of growing commercialization of media, media ethics have assumed greater relevance. When information is presented not in its entirety, out of context, or selectively to suit vested interests, the first casualty is truth. The demands of timeliness and urgency have resulted in speed overtaking the truth. With the presence of a vast quantity of information that is available today, it is becoming more and more difficult to monitor the quality and veracity of information. A healthy media critique, vigilance and participation of a larger segment of the community can help instil greater sense of truth

and value to information media.

4. Education and Communication

4.1 Education for a New World Information and Communication Order

Communication is basically concerned with establishing commonness, solidarity. People should not remain merely beneficiaries but active partners in the process of communication. This calls for a systematic effort to integrate education in and for communication. Education includes working with the popular sectors in strengthening people's self-awareness, awakening communicative potential and providing adequate technical know-how. It includes a shared process of creating meaning and identity. Training and education should be guided by experts who will carry out research on the problems related to education in communication and propose viable alternatives. Education should create an ambience in which there is two-way, balanced and participatory communication which will help usher in the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).

Education should enable the individual to move from being a mere object of communication to being an active element within it. Everyone should have free access to and equal opportunity to use information and communication media. The people should participate in the production and distribution of messages and in the decision-making process of communication policy and communication planning.

Democratizing communication should be an integral part of the national educational plans. People should not only have access to media and information. But know how to use them effectively. Education should enhance one's cultural identity and encourage the process of self and social awareness and the need for change. Alternative communication is an integral part of the process of encouraging participation and change. NWICO calls for the decolonization of information at the international level and the democratization of communication at the national level. This has important implications in the way of training and curriculum development in the field of communication studies. Education in media should create an environment in which those being trained are in direct contact with cultures, traditions, values and development needs of the

people.

More particularly, mass media exerts a great influence on education. This requires that media be studied, and media education be effectively introduced into the academic curriculum.

4.2 Media Education

Media education is a process of critical reflection on the mass media for a more responsible participation in society.

It involves three factors:

a) awareness of the anatomy, language and technique,

b) analysis and 'evaluation' of the effect on individuals and society of content, medium, promotional strategy used, political and economic control,

c) participation of the media-educated person in the construction of socially relevant messages by using the media.

Media Education has the following objectives:

- to understand the media culture
- to be familiar with the media language a to appreciate creativity and art
- to know and understand the media marketing strategy
- to know how people work or network in media
- to demythologise media
- to understand the relation between fact and construction of meaning
- to know the difference between media life and real life.

Neil Anderson an expert on media says: "Media Literacy is no longer separable from education. If we train students in basic skills such as reading and arithmetic ... we must teach them about the media as well."

4.3 UNESCO Declaration on Media Education

(The UNESCO Declaration was issued unanimously by the representatives of 19 nations at UNESCO's 1982 International Symposium on Media Education in Germany.)

We live in a world where media is omnipresent. An increasing number of people spend a great deal of time watching television, reading newspapers and magazines, playing records and listening to the radio. In some countries, for example, children already spend more time watching television than they do attending

school.

Rather than condemn or endorse the undoubted power of the media, there is need to accept their significant impact and penetration throughout the world as an established fact, and also appreciate their importance as an element of culture in today's world. The role of communication and media in the process of development should not be underestimated, nor the function of media as instruments for the citizen's active participation in society. Political and educational systems need to recognize their obligations to promote in their citizens, a critical understanding of the phenomena of communication.

Regrettably most informal and non-formal educational systems do little to promote Media Education or education for communication. Too often the gap between the educational experience they offer and the real world in which people live is disturbingly wide. But if the arguments for Media Education as a preparation for responsible citizenship are formidable now, in the very near future with the development of communication technology such as satellite broadcasting, two ways cable systems, television data systems, video cassette and disc materials, they ought to be irresistible, given the choice in media consumption resulting from these developments.

Responsible educators will not ignore these developments but will work alongside their students in understanding them and making sense of such consequences as the rapid development of two-way communication and the ensuing individualization and access to information. This is not to underestimate the impact on cultural identity or the flow of information and ideas between cultures by the mass media.

Media Education will be most effective when parents, teachers, media personnel and decision-makers all acknowledge that they have a role to play in developing greater critical awareness among listeners, viewers and readers. The greater integration of educational and communication systems would undoubtedly be an important step towards more effective education.

We therefore call upon the competent authorities to:

1) initiate and support comprehensive Media Education programmes — from pre-school to university level, and in adult education — the purpose of which is to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes which will encourage the growth of critical awareness and, consequently, greater competence among the users of electronic and print media. Ideally, such programmes should include the analysis of media products, the use of media as a means of creative expression, and effective use of and participation in available media channels;

2) develop training courses for teachers and intermediaries both to increase their knowledge and understand media and train them in appropriate teaching methods;

3) stimulate research and development activities for the benefit of Media Education, from such domains as psychology, sociology, and communication science; and

4) support and strengthen the actions undertaken or envisaged by UNESCO which aims at encouraging international cooperation.

5. Conclusion

Information Education and Communication are more relevant and people friendly. Message appeal head and heart of the audience. People attitude/behaviour doesn't get affected even after gaining knowledge from the society. The large numbers of people were aware of this disease before getting infected. The Information Education and Communication are providing necessary life skills to the individuals that are essential for avoiding HIV infection. IEC remarkably rise in knowledge, significant refinement in the perception towards the disease or community and there was outstanding improvement in the sexual practices also. Misconceptions on HIV prevention, stigmatization, transmission and discriminatory behaviour were prevalent among the adolescents. Confusions were seen as indicators of HIV related shame and separation. Programmes utilizing joined IEC mediations should be strengthened to disperse the overall misguided judgments in transmission and counteraction of HIV/AIDS and the related disgrace and segregation.

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