

# INTERNEWS

## LOCAL VOICES: Media Makes A Difference

### LOCAL VOICES STORIES

#### TO BE MUSLIM AND HIV-POSITIVE:

Under a travel grant from Internews, radio presenter and producer Zainab Aziz traveled to the eastern city of Mombasa to produce an interview with a Muslim woman living with HIV/AIDS who fought against discrimination.

*"Many Kenyans phoned in, commending this woman for being public about her HIV status, saying they did not know of one Muslim who has done this, since AIDS is such a stigmatized disease in this community," Aziz said in a letter to Internews. "I am Muslim myself, and felt great in being able to play a role, even if it was just a small one, in destigmatizing the disease in my community."*

#### GETTING TESTED, DISCLOSING HIV STATUS:

Nigeria's Godwin Odemije is one of several journalists who produce regular AIDS-related programs at Internews' production studio and media resource center in Abuja. Internews recently helped him to produce a half-hour program about getting tested for HIV and disclosing one's HIV/AIDS status to a loved one.

*"It was one of the best programs I've ever produced," said Odemije. "My mailbox was filled up for days with messages from listeners and NGO activists."*

For all the incomparable power of media to confront the health and social challenges posed by HIV/AIDS, its true potential has been virtually untapped. Traditional approaches view media as a vehicle for disseminating health messages, rather than a significant force that can drive life-saving change on the ground.

#### Change begins with asking better questions:

What encourages family members and neighbors to provide support and compassion to people living with HIV/AIDS? What prompts people to go for HIV testing? What gets people talking openly about HIV/AIDS issues and stimulates critical policy changes?

The search for answers to these questions has led to a comprehensive new approach that harnesses the power of local media.

#### UNPRECEDENTED COMMUNICATION OF AND ACCESS TO HIV/AIDS INFORMATION

The Local Voices approach opens lines of communication that simply have not been opened before – communication that is crucial to making HIV/AIDS information accessible and part of people's everyday lives.

Internews' Local Voices projects engage the local media as a long-term partner: one who will take on the complex issue of AIDS for years to come, and one worth investing in.

Equipping media professionals and journalists with the knowledge and skills to talk responsibly about HIV/AIDS is essential, but they need more: they need the skills to translate that knowledge into effective stories and programs. They need training and organization-wide support to improve daily reporting, provide compelling story lines, and increase the frequency and improve the quality of HIV/AIDS features and radio call-in shows – a particularly effective tool in reaching people and establishing dialogue with listeners. The ultimate goal is to sustain media interest in HIV/AIDS so that they will keep the public engaged for as long as the epidemic is with us. To that end, Internews develops programs that:

- • • **Understand local media culture and engage all levels of the industry** – from owners and managers who commit to refocusing resources; to editors who infuse programming with positive messages; to DJs and talk-show hosts who find creative ways to make HIV/AIDS relevant and accessible; to journalists who look beyond cold statistics in order to put a voice and face on the story.

- • • **Make sure people living with HIV/AIDS participate in all training activities.** Local media players personally interact with and learn to portray people living with HIV/AIDS in a more positive manner.

- • • **Assist local AIDS NGOs and local associations of people living with HIV/AIDS in communicating their messages more effectively** – thereby adding their voices to the public dialogue.

- • • **Bolster other HIV prevention, care and treatment efforts, increasing their chances of success.**

#### LOCAL VOICES FINDS AN AUDIENCE

In Kenya and Nigeria, Local Voices, funded by USAID, trains radio journalists, disc jockeys and talk-show hosts in the science of HIV, as well as technical radio production skills, script writing, and research skills. Graduates have ongoing access to a media resource center, production studio, and technical support from Local Voices staff. The program has enjoyed wide acceptance:

"My understanding and perception of people living with AIDS is completely different now and has changed for the better," said Reverend Funke Alli, General Manager, of Ray Power 106.5 FM, Lagos Nigeria, after attending the Local Voices training. "That alone is going to affect my programming. It's given me a drive to tell listeners what I now know – that people living with HIV and AIDS can lead fulfilled lives."

Local Voices can harness the power of media to confront the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS, encourage positive changes in public perception, and stimulate life-saving policy reform.

#### MORE INFORMATION

- Marjorie Rouse (Marjorie@internews.org)  
• Director of Global Initiatives  
• Internews Network  
• 1640 Rhode Island Ave. NW  
• Washington, DC 20036  
• 202-833-5740 x304

- or  
• Liz Gold (Lgold@internews.org)  
• Internews Network HIV/AIDS Advisor

- [www.internews.org](http://www.internews.org)



*IQRA FM journalist Zainab Dinn edits her radio feature on HIV/AIDS in the Internews radio studio using skills she learned in her training seminar.*



INTERNEWS