Overview

In response to the environment of stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV) in Malawi, a short weekly Radio Diaries series was developed to provide PLHIV’s an opportunity to share the realities of their lives with the public, and help listeners to understand better how PLHIV overcame challenges in their daily lives. The overall objectives of the Radio Diaries program were established based on the foundational creative concept of the show and formative research:

• Reduce stigma and discrimination against people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS in Malawi communities;

• Reduce stigma that prevents people from taking action to know their HIV status and discuss HIV prevention with their partners;

• Increase involvement of the general public in HIV and AIDS issues;

• Increase understanding of personal risk and vulnerability to HIV and AIDS among the general population.

The Radio Diaries were initiated under the BRIDGE I project, produced through the collaborative effort of many different partners: BRIDGE II, Galaxy Media, Story Workshop Educational Trust, National Association of People Living with HIV (NAPHAM), and 14 radio stations. NAPHAM identified potential diarists from within their support groups. Galaxy Media trained the diarists alongside radio producers to creatively and effectively tell the stories of PLHIV and record their stories for radio. Story Workshop then incorporated the Radio Diaries segments into the Chenicheni Nchiti? reality radio program, which was distributed and aired by 16 radio stations. BRIDGE II provided technical assistance throughout the process.

Voices from the Field

Fatima Makawa said she attained peace of mind after becoming a diarist for BRIDGE II and sharing her story.

“Becoming a diarist for the BRIDGE II Project and sharing my story took away all the fears regarding HIV and AIDS from my mind. On top of that, people from my community are more open with me and they come to me for advice on positive living.”

Foundational Creative Concept

The concept of the Radio Diaries emerged from the idea that creating an emotional connection between listeners and HIV-positive diarists can reduce stigma and make society more accepting of people living with HIV. Through the stories told in the Radio Diaries, listeners would identify with some of the life experiences discussed on the program, even if they did not have HIV. In this way, listeners would feel a personal connection with the HIV-positive diarists, and would be less likely to stigmatize or discriminate against people living with HIV that they encountered in their daily lives.
Radio diarists and producers pose for a photo at a Radio Diary training workshop in Blantyre organized by Galaxy Media.

**Achievements**

Under BRIDGE I, the Radio Diaries had a significant effect on the diarists, radio producers, and listeners. By recording and broadcasting their real life experiences, the diarists gained significant self-esteem and became role models and leaders in combating the spread of HIV. The diaries also served a capacity building role among the radio producers, who were able to develop and introduce new innovative methods of program production; many were quickly promoted to more senior roles. The diaries also had a large impact on their audience: in a small survey of people going for HIV testing during National HIV Testing Week in 2006, more than 50% of them attributed their decision to get tested to listening to the Radio Diaries programs.

During BRIDGE II, several high profile diarists were engaged to expand awareness that HIV can affect people from all walks of life. For example, an HIV-positive senior civil servant and a high-profile HIV-positive academic told their stories through the Radio Diaries. Together, they sent a message that HIV can impact anyone, regardless of their background. They also appealed to other high profile leaders in Malawi such as politicians, religious leaders, and business leaders who are HIV positive to share their status and story, in the hope that they would serve as role models for others and encourage HIV testing and positive living for all Malawians.

**During the implementation of BRIDGE II:**

- Over 320 Radio Diaries were produced and aired on 16 radio stations.
- Engaged 21 radio diarists of whom 20 were PLHIVs to share their life stories through the Radio Diaries.
- Trained 16 producers in reality programming.

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Local Partners: Corporate Graphics, J&F Consult, Galaxy Media Consultants, National Association of People Living with HIV and AIDS in Malawi, Story Workshop Educational Trust, YouthNet and Counseling