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## HIV/AIDS COMMUNICATION AND PREVENTION: AN INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to a special issue of *Glocal Times* originated in a seminar organized by *HIV/AIDS Communication and Prevention*, a health communication research program hosted by the University of Copenhagen, coordinated by myself at Roskilde University, and funded by DANIDA. The seminar was held in Copenhagen in November 2005 and webcasted through Malmö University's Master in Communication for Development webzone, and this issue of *Glocal Times* has expanded its original reach to include yet another contribution by Dutch-Jamaican expert Marjan De Bruin.

### BACKGROUND

The seminar constituted the closing activity of the above-mentioned research program, which involved three Danish researchers: Helle Samuelsen, who worked with Burkina Faso, and myself working with South Africa. In addition to this African focus, Pil Giersing conducted fieldwork in Vietnam. The program has published a range of articles, one book and a seminar report, and has yet another book in the pipeline. It has also co-organised a series of previous seminars. In June 2002, with DANIDA and the ENRECA Health Research Network, a special seminar was held for all DANIDA's health advisors. Entitled "Communicating HIV/AIDS Prevention to Young People in Low-Income Societies", its report can be requested to [ttufte@ruc.dk](mailto:ttufte@ruc.dk). In January 2003, an international seminar was held at the University of Copenhagen, with visitors such as Rafael Obregon from the PanAmerican Health Organisation in Washington, Neill McKee from Johns Hopkins University, and Larry Strelitz from Rhodes University in South Africa. Guest speakers who visited Denmark in the context of the project -all leading international HIV/AIDS communication scholars and practitioners- included: James Deane (former director of PANOS); Minou Fuglesang (director of the FEMINA Health Information Project in Tanzania); Scott Ratzan, (editor-in-chief of the Journal of Health Communication); Arvind Singhal (Ohio University); Martine Boumann (chairperson of the Dutch Entertainment-Education Foundation); John Molefe and Garth Japhet (from Soul City in South Africa).

The research concern of the project has been to study perceptions of sexuality and HIV/AIDS, as well as exploring communication -or the lack of it- around HIV/AIDS in local settings in South Africa, Burkina Faso and Vietnam. The focus on the role of communication -strategic communication but also everyday communication about HIV/AIDS- was deliberate. The point of departure has been that both mass communications through the media and interpersonal communication through social networks of peers and families are crucial elements in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

## PURPOSE

This special issue of *Glocal Times* is published four years after the creation of the Global Fund, launched early in 2002 to generate additional international funds for the fight against HIV/AIDS. 2005 marked the tenth anniversary of UNAIDS, and 2006 signals twenty years since WHO's first AIDS program was launched in 1986. Moreover, it was twenty-five years ago that the first case of HIV was identified. One might ask, thus, what we have achieved with these twenty years of efforts. Since 1996, there have been significant advances on the treatment side with the introduction of ARV. However, if we look at prevention, we still have a long way to go.

The main achievement as regards communication over the twenty years of efforts is that we have succeeded in getting information out there. The dissemination of information has been quite successful, and if you conduct demographic health surveys in Southern Africa today, in general you will find quite high levels of knowledge. That is an achievement. However, if you look at the curves, only very few countries have managed to break the devastating lethal curve of HIV positive people and of people dying of AIDS. The increased levels of information that people have about means of transmission and ways to protect themselves have not led to the significant changes in individual behaviour that are required to stop the pandemic from spreading. This raises questions about how we communicate and what we communicate, but even more importantly, it seems to indicate the need for a fundamentally new way of using communication.

The goal of information dissemination is increasingly being met, but all the contextual issues in HIV/AIDS prevention are not being addressed enough, or well enough.

Thus, we must focus on the more important communication challenge in the future fight against HIV/AIDS: to move beyond the simplicity of communicating just the A, the B and the C of HIV/AIDS Communication. The ABC-approach (Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms) focuses on a limited perspective of the complex reality of sexuality, social relationships and love. As Minou Fuglesang has mentioned, "we have to communicate about the rest of the alphabet too. The D for desire, the E for emotions, the K for kisses, the M for masturbation, the R for rape and the V for violence".

The idea with this special edition of *Glocal Times*, in line with the above

introduced research program, is thus to hopefully broaden the view of how to tackle HIV/AIDS from a communications perspective. Instead of seeing it as a tool for individual behaviour change only, communication should be increasingly considered and explored as a means to articulate social critique, social movement, and ultimately social and structural change, thereby addressing some of all the underlying factors: power inequality, rights-based issues, social injustice, gender imbalances, disempowerment and apathy. We all know that HIV/AIDS is not a health problem, but a poverty and development problem. The question is: how do we deal with that in our responses, campaigns and programmes?

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