

# Media Strategies of HIV/AIDS Communication for Behaviour Change in South West Nigeria

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**Key Terms:** Communication strategies, social marketing, media, behaviour change, HIV/AIDS.

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## Abstract

The Nigerian media are key instruments of HIV/AIDS communication. They use different techniques to influence human knowledge, attitude and practice. Through the qualitative approach, the study identified the media and strategies commonly used for HIV/AIDS behaviour change communication in Nigeria. It triangulated unobtrusive observation and in-depth interviews through the viewing of selected broadcast, film and outdoor media in South-West Nigeria. In-depth interviews complemented the data. Results revealed the use of social marketing to enhance acceptance, retention and recall of HIV messages. Repetition, context-specific languages, credible sources and integration of advertisement, drama, news and public service announcements increased information availability, affordability, accessibility and comprehension. While entertainment constituted the most used communication method, messages were anchored on HIV/AIDS prevention. Comparatively, findings showed a drastic decrease of HIV information in contemporary Nigerian media and this may have implications for

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national health development. Hence, there is a need to re-strategize communication and reconstruct media for the maintenance of acquired new behaviours. This is necessary because the media possess the ability and capacity to improve knowledge, set agenda for public discourse and influence public opinion and policy formulation in the sub-Saharan region.

### **Introduction**

HIV/AIDS is one of the greatest health challenges threatening the developing countries today. It leaves indelible marks that are avoidable with proper knowledge and compliant behaviour. Although it is a popular health topic in global media discourse, context-specific and culture-oriented campaigns would impact both urban and rural publics for positive health orientation and behaviour change. This type of communication would be less discriminatory but rather affect receivers' knowledge, attitude and practice irrespective of their socio-demographic, economic and cultural backgrounds.

Some modern communication technologies may limit information availability to specific media consumers, making developing countries and the grassroots estranged from current trends associated with the epidemic. Little is thus known or documented about context and culture-specific media strategies utilised for easy availability, affordability, accessibility and comprehension of HIV messages in a pluralistic country like Nigeria.

The present paper examines the common media platforms used for HIV campaign and identifies the information dissemination strategies, language and subject of HIV/AIDS communication in the Nigerian media. It describes the type of information available to the Nigerian publics and the preventive mechanisms adapted to impact on public opinion and human response.

Education was seen as “the only vaccine against AIDS” in the early years of its control (Liskin et al., 1989). However, on its own merit, education may not bring about intended behaviour change if teaching methods are not made appealing and relevant to receivers. The role of the media is thus crucial as media campaign in Nigeria remain a vital tool for educating literate and non literate populations. Accordingly, information and education were identified core components of the national AIDS programme, to be achieved through media output (Odotola, et al, 2006). Mass media have the potential of providing necessary information and improving knowledge and understanding by setting agenda for public discourse and policy formulation. Media organizations and change agencies organise programmes to raise public awareness and combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. Such campaigns would determine the level of human exposure, vulnerability and prevention.

Contextualized communication fosters focused and oriented discourse and informs decision-making. This strategy is important because out of the over three million new infections occurring each year in Africa, Nigeria is identified as having a large proportion with a higher prevalence among sexually active adults aged 15-49 years (Musa, 2006; FMOH, 2006). This calls for strategizing communication for specific social groups to control its spread and enhance human development. Behaviour Change Communication (BBC) is vital in this regard for sharing ideas, information and messages for HIV/AIDS prevention.

Communication should not be limited to verbal (speech, writing) forms alone but should integrate nonverbal (facial expressions, body language, or gestures), visual (images or pictures like painting, photography), electronic (telephone, television, radio) and online communication. Although radio, television, newspapers, billboards and films have often been used for health promotion in Nigeria, a combination of the above forms would effectively deliver

HIV/AIDS information to diverse Nigerian publics for health development.

While HIV/AIDS prevention remains the most viable option in developing countries, there is need to reconstruct information and media for the maintenance of new behaviours. BCC must therefore move people from awareness to action driven behaviours. This is possible because the Nigerian media possess the ability and capacity of disseminating preventive HIV/AIDS information that would set agenda and influence public opinion. Media professionals should therefore make health information accessible by millions of Nigerians.

### **Mass media and public health campaign**

Health campaigns are aimed at promoting defined objectives like the fight against HIV/AIDS. Different communication techniques including participatory, media advocacy, multi-pronged approaches and creative media formats are used to influence the behaviour of target audiences. Despite the usefulness of the media in transmitting health-related information, there has been skepticism about its future in providing positive sex education (Agfa, 2003). Ironically, the media have been relevant in exposing sex-induced HIV/AIDS, breaking societal taboos surrounding public discussion of sexuality and keeping sexual health on public agenda.

In other words, the role of the mass media for public health development can not be overemphasized as they remain key instruments for health campaign geared toward behaviour change. The media have been effectively used in Nigeria to promote sexual and reproductive health, population control and HIV/AIDS causes, symptoms, dangers and effect. The campaign for immunization enabled the reduction of infant and child mortality while people have also benefited from malaria and other kinds of public health campaigns. The media emphasize societal responsibility for improved

health conditions; educate the population about risky behaviours, vulnerability, prevention and treatment of some diseases.

Communication thus creates awareness, increases knowledge, builds approval, and encourages healthy attitudes and behaviours. Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) motivates the adoption and sustenance of healthy behaviours and lifestyle. An intervention campaigner must therefore be clear about whose behaviour is intended to be influenced, which aspects of behaviour are targeted for change and the best communication strategies for achieving these goals.

Health campaigns are designed to suit target groups but even within the same broad group, there may be subgroups requiring different communication styles. Variance in group composition requires diverse approaches, hence, integrated communication. This model is important because behaviour change generally begins with the individual and requires strategies for modification of personal knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices. Mass media are thus important in advancing public health agendas through a range of approaches like soap operas, youth friendly programmes and network campaigns. Participatory and community-based approaches may complement the mass media.

### **Methods**

The study used the qualitative approach to investigate the media and strategies used for HIV/AIDS communication in Nigeria. It triangulated unobtrusive observation and in-depth interviews to identify media platforms and techniques used for behaviour change communication. While selected broadcast, film and outdoor media in the South-West were observed, in-depth interviews were conducted among residents in the same geopolitical area. Accordingly,

television, radio, home video and billboards were observed and analysed for HIV messages, genre and styles of presentation.

Two private and two public television stations situated in Lagos were randomly selected, viewed and analysed for HIV/AIDS content, information sources, language and behaviour change communication strategies. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Africa Independent Television (AIT), Silverbird Television (AIT) and Lagos Television were randomly selected, viewed and analysed. The same applied to information accessed in radio while movies and billboards were also observed and analysed for HIV/AIDS information.

To complement the findings from the observation method, 12 in-depth interviews of males and females were conducted to examine the issues surrounding HIV media messages, the strategies adopted for information dissemination and the impact of such messages on their attitude and behaviour. Male and female adolescents and adults were interviewed to ascertain their levels of exposure, acceptance, retention and recall of HIV/AIDS media messages.

Through in-depth investigation, respondents provided information, highlighting the media and communication strategies adopted and the possible influence on consumer behaviour. Data were analysed through the descriptive method which entailed transcription, sorting, and thematic presentation of finding. Secondary data complemented qualitative findings by providing background information of some HIV/AIDS media programmes as well as the extent of their coverage across the nation.

### **Media and strategies adopted for HIV/AIDS communication**

Since HIV/AIDS first emerged, the role of behaviour change has been recognized as critical to its control. In Nigeria, diverse media convey

its messages while communicators employ social marketing strategies to reach specific audiences, enabling acceptance, retention and recollection of received messages. Media professionals engage in marketing and consumer research to identify the best techniques for achieving effective behaviour change communication. Through positioning, segmentation, creativity, design and media planning, attempts are made to inform, persuade, influence and motivate people to gain acceptance of new ideas and reinforce behaviour change. The underlying assumption is that, improving people's knowledge about the infection would bring about avoidable risky behaviours.

Accordingly, different communication approaches were utilised to improve human knowledge of HIV and AIDS. This is necessary because of the different socio-cultural backgrounds, beliefs, environment and mindset of people concerning the virus. While some initially doubted the existence of HIV/AIDS, others saw it as a myth intended to discourage premarital and extramarital sex in the society. Meanwhile, another group of people said it was a strategy meant for promoting the sales of condom.

With this background, the media had the responsibility of dispelling such myths and misconceptions through the provision of accurate information. This was intended to empower informed decision making among individuals and communities toward behaviour change. They utilised media that could be accessed by both rural and urban populations, using indigenous languages as well as context-oriented communication strategies that would be appealing to both publics. The entertainment media technique easily delivered these educative messages.

In other words, Behaviour Change Communication captures the attention of target audiences based on the principles of social marketing, where entertainment is used to promote acceptance, retention and recall of messages. Advertisements, drama, talk shows

and home movies transmitted messages to diversified audiences using “edutainment”. Entertainment-education is frequently used in Nigeria for HIV/AIDS communication because of the effectiveness of the method (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004). News, public service announcements and billboards complemented such messages.

Although HIV/AIDS messages initially flooded the Nigerian media air space, the study found a disturbing occurrence as there is a drastic reduction of HIV content in contemporary media. This finding was reiterated by interviewees, who noted that it is now a bit difficult to find HIV/AIDS information in television, radio and billboards. Expatriating, some discussants attributed it to saturation and over-flogging of the issue which has made most people to have a working knowledge and awareness of HIV. It was also associated to the availability of more recent health issues that may be more attractive to the audience. This assumption may have contributed to the shift in media content from HIV to more contemporary health issues addressed in global media. In the words of an adolescent female:

Since the beginning of this year (2011), I have not heard anything (HIV/AIDS) except when they are advertising condom and they say that safe sex is good. When HIV was new and at its peak, there was a lot on air about it. It seems almost everybody knows about the issue now. It is not in ‘vogue’ again and as a result, it has been sidelined by the media.

The decrease in popularity of HIV/AIDS has also been attributed to diminishing funding by development partners. The global economic melt down affected the probability of having HIV content in media airspace. This explanation was provided by the Director, Partnership Coordination of the Nigerian National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA), Mrs. Maimuna Mohammed. According to her:



HIV awareness is low as 85 per cent of the funds we were getting was from our partners, but with the economic meltdown, they have reduced the amount they send to the developing countries, so the activities have decreased... There is need for companies to be involved, if for example the radio station gives us one minute every day, TV gives us one minute every day, it is a cost to the TV but it's a gain for our own country. And if all oil companies, all banks, all service providers will give us support one way or the other, it doesn't have to be cash that would go a long way (Nigerian Observer, 2011).

The relationship between media content and development partners throws more light on the factors that promoted HIV/AIDS visibility in the Nigerian air space. It is obvious that awareness campaigns relied heavily on sponsorship. Most of the information was packaged primarily for prevention, hence, messages centered on abstinence, condom use, fidelity, delayed sexual debut and risk perception. The information was disseminated through individual and integrated media and the strategy brought about easy availability, affordability, accessibility and comprehension of HIV messages. Television, radio, billboards, posters and films provided information on different aspects of the pandemic, using diverse communication mechanisms, intended to reduce the spread of the virus.

To ensure acceptance of the message, role models like religious leaders, indigenous experts, artists, movie and football stars were the projected credible sources of HIV messages. Entertainment was mostly used to convey the information while different media channels transmitted the messages to the Nigerian publics.

### ***Radio***

Radio is a very important communication tool in Nigeria because it reaches mass audiences, including the hinterlands, at less penetration barriers and low costs. It makes possible the reception of information

among populations who ordinarily would have been cut off from receiving HIV/AIDS messages because of the challenging power situation in the country. This challenge is overcome by the radio, whose users are able to receive national and international information without electricity barriers. In addition, the specialization of radio stations, including rural community radio, permits more selectivity in reaching audience segments. This indicates that the advantages of the radio are enormous.

Radio reaches the interior; it is cost effective and highly dependable by mobile populations because of its portability. Radio conveys public health messages in greater detail, requires greater audience involvement and creates the need for more mental imagery. Its phone-in programmes encourage young people to participate in discussion on traditional taboo topics like safe sex, providing informative, educative and persuasive HIV/AIDS messages delivered by experts to target audiences. The viability of the radio has made some intervention campaigners to transmit HIV/AIDS messages through this medium.

In 2005, the BBC World Service Trust (WST) began working in partnership with a range of Nigerian broadcasters and media professionals to raise HIV and AIDS awareness that could change behaviour among young Nigerians aged 15-24 years. The messages were disseminated through talk show discussions, which created a forum where young people freely discussed issues on relationships, sexual and reproductive health. To enable reception of beneficial messages by literate and non literate people, Pidgin English and Hausa were used in transmitting *Flava* and *Ya Take Ne*, which explored HIV and AIDS related issues, sexual health and gender.

The programme also addressed stigma, preventive mother to child transmission, HIV and marriage, family planning, women's rights, among others. They received wide coverage as *Flava* was

broadcast by 50 Nigerian radio stations while *Ya Take Ne* was transmitted by 35 radio stations (Akinlabi, et al. 2009). Another radio serial broadcast in nine languages on 42 radio channels was *Future Dreams* (Population Services International, 2003). Its core message was to encourage consistent condom use and improve negotiation skills among unmarried youth.

Radio drama aimed at increasing knowledge of the causes and consequences of HIV/AIDS were organised by the Society for Family and Health (SFH). The dramas were presented in English and indigenous languages to enable message intelligibility and comprehension among all types of their audiences. *One Thing at a Time*, *Garin muna fata*, *Odenjinji*, and *Abule oloke merin* were aired in the West and North.

Other communication initiatives include the United States Embassy sponsored HIV/AIDS awareness programme in 16 Nigerian universities, using campus and regional radio to convey abstinence, fidelity, blood safety and de-stigmatization. Talk shows and jingles were some of the strategies adopted while condom advertisements, news, and public service announcements also contributed in disseminating the information. Some news and announcements were provided by the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA). Although radio was greatly explored for the campaign, its messages have dramatically declined. Between 2010 and 2011, one is hardly exposed to such information. Interviewees also observed the reduction in HIV/AIDS message. While an adolescent female noted that HIV is presented on radio "only when they are advertising condom", another girl added that "it is only a talk show on Radio Rivers" that makes people living with the virus to narrate their experiences. The carriers tell "people that having HIV/AIDS is not the end of life but can be controlled just like every other disease".

*Flavor* is an ongoing short drama on RayPower to educate people about the disease and its prevention. Radio programmes meant for in-school and out-of-school youth are broadcast in English, Pidgin and other Nigerian languages. They range from advertisements, talk shows, drama and announcements based on the principles of social marketing.

### *Television*

Television is an attractive medium to many information receivers because it combines sight and sound, making dramatic presentations of messages, ideas, events and products appealing to viewers. It reaches diverse people regardless of their socio-demographic characteristics. Television stations allocate time slots to inform their audiences on different aspects of HIV/AIDS. Drama, advertisement, public service announcements and news are the most popular forms of HIV/AIDS communication in Nigeria.

Sponsored HIV programmes are transmitted by NTA, Channels, Silverbird and other television stations. Complementing its Radio campaign, the Society for Family and Health (SFH) produced a commercial to promote safe sex. It featured Sunday Oliseh, a Nigerian soccer star, as a ploy to attract the audience's attention to the core message. In addition, the National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA), in collaboration with international agencies, sponsored some commercials. "Zip Up" and "Say No to HIV/AIDS" are popular advert slogans in the country. Another advert used a virgin to convey the message that "prevention is better than cure".

The structuring of these adverts in terms of the environment, participants, events, colours and message composition makes comprehension and recall easy. Discussants noted that the TV commercials were appealing, attracted attention and enabled a recall of the messages due to the choice of words, music, drama and

circumstances surrounding the presentation. Some adolescent females observed:

Female 1: There is this commercial on NTA network news that was stopped about 2-3 years ago. It used musical appeal. A woman and a man were shown in a recording studio singing "one day, one guy, one day, one girl". The message of the advertisement was to create awareness to people who have multiple sexual partners to be careful and settle with only one partner because having multiple partners can increase the risk of getting HIV.

Female 2: The thing is that, the adverts are always very attractive. There is no way that you will want to miss any one of them when they are aired.

Using another strategy, a 30-minute weekly TV drama series explained ways through which HIV/AIDS could be contracted or prevented. *Wetin Dey* explored the social realities faced by young Nigerians and raised HIV and AIDS awareness across regional, ethnic and class divides. The drama was enacted in Pidgin to eliminate literacy barriers and enable free flow of information. Fifty-two episodes were broadcast at peak viewing periods as NTA network programme (Akinlabi, et al, 2009). An interviewee that has watched this drama in 2010 reported that:

This television drama series encourages people, especially the youth, to stay away from unprotected sex, unsterilized sharp objects, etc. It also tries to depict the living conditions of people living with HIV/AIDS. It discourages the ostracizing of carriers.

World Health Organization (WHO) also sponsored programmes to raise HIV profile and foster understanding of related issues. The TV drama, *I Need to Know*, provided information on the

importance of knowing ones status, the dangers of the epidemic and its preventive measures. It was widely broadcast across the country through NTA network channels while *Awakening* was programmed to stimulate community dialogue on HIV/AIDS. Bayelsa youth-sponsored drama displayed messages to avoid multiple sexual networking.

Messages were also transmitted through credible sources. Pastor E. A. Adeboye, medical professionals, experts and those living with the virus provided information using different approaches like advice, discussions, interviews and testimonies. Some of these media campaigns were aimed at reducing the spread of the virus and improving care and support for people living with it. Some adult females stated:

Female 1: Messages on HIV/AIDS were more in the past. Today, they are very few as we hardly see them on television. Most of the things you hear on television now are issues like immunization. I remember the message by Pastor Adeboye which encouraged people to fight against HIV/AIDS. I do not see it again. I think the media are getting tired of HIV or they have more attractive issues to focus on.

Female 2: Testimonials of people living with the virus are also aired. A female actress, Marilon Wayas, who has been living with the virus for about 18 years, is made to provide advice for healthy living and to discourage discrimination.

Female 3: Another method is that different people that have HIV are interviewed and made to share their experiences. At the end, a voice would say "HIV patients live near you and millions of Africans have the virus and die daily because of the virus". This is to discourage discrimination but promote love for HIV patients.

Findings show a rapid decline in HIV/AIDS content on mainstream television. Although most interviewees also drew attention to this drop, an adult male and female interviewee identified a private channel that is currently displaying HIV/AIDS information. According to them, Television Continental (TVC) uses drama, community sensitization and commercials to reach its publics with HIV/AIDS messages. This was contrasted with some other private and public stations like AIT, STV, NTA and Channels Television where the issue is rarely viewed. According to the male, while TVC staff go to communities to develop HIV/AIDS awareness using the programme *Imagine Africa*, *Bayelsan Silhouette* conveys messages on abstinence, safe sex, condom use, faithfulness, HIV testing and care for people living with HIV/AIDS. Most of the adverts draw people's attention with the words, "imagine a world without HIV/AIDS". All these strategies produced stimulating messages that informed and impacted audience attitudes and behaviours. This was highlighted by most of the interviewees who stated that HIV information contributed to some major decisions and actions they have taken, including sexual relations.

### ***Video Films***

Nigeria has an active and well-established video film industry which appeals to the populace for entertainment. To complement information received through the broadcast media, HIV/AIDS messages are disseminated through home videos because of the popularity of the medium. Many of these films feature strong social and moral messages designed to improve people's knowledge, attitude and behaviour. The importance of exploring home videos for behaviour change is because of their attractiveness and capacity to affect the sexuality aspirations of young people (Obono and Obono, 2009). The messages embedded in the films could be readily accessed through personal purchase, borrowing or telecast.

Accordingly, *Stop HIV*, in partnership with the Nigerian video film industry, (Nollywood) incorporated HIV/AIDS messages into the storylines of a number of films to appeal to large audiences (Akinlabi, et al. 2009). The messages anchored on condom promotion and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS. Other movies with HIV/AIDS content are displayed by Africa Magic and Magic World. Through this medium, *Another Chance*, which was produced in 2009, touched the lives of many children, youth and adults with HIV/AIDS-related messages. While a lady was advised by her friends to go for an HIV test, a woman facing stigmatization and rejection encouraged the public to treat HIV patients with care, love and affection, and give them hope for the future. Although some of these campaigns used the humorous appeal, the crucial message was easily transmitted to both the intended and unintended audiences.

### *Outdoor Media*

Sex is traditionally a very private subject in Nigeria and discussion with teenagers is often regarded inappropriate despite the fact that they are the most affected with HIV virus because of their sexual choices. Attempts at providing sex education for young people have been hampered by religious and cultural objections (Odotola et al, 2006). Billboards and posters have thus been used to disseminate sexually-related messages, including HIV/AIDS. Although such information was prominent in most public places, they are now limited as it is rare to find recent HIV/AIDS billboards and posters. Interviewees narrated similar observation but have lingering impressions about messages previously displayed. Issues on stigmatization, abstinence, condom use, and HIV test are found in both pictorial and text formats for easy visualization, comprehension and retention of messages.

A billboard campaign to increase awareness that AIDS is real and an HIV positive person may not be known by mere physical looks



is communicated through different appeals. One popular billboard is that of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, the Nigerian Afro beat legend who died of AIDS in 1997. His image appears boldly on billboards along roads throughout the country with the slogan "AIDS: No dey show for face, please protect yourself". The picture is simple but with multifaceted messages. Although he is portrayed as a musician carrying his guitar, the underlying message is telling people to abstain from sexual networking, which the star was noted for. The message is also for people to understand that HIV is real and has no respect for persons, since anybody can contact it.

Communication of sexual abstinence for young people is displayed in the "Zip Up" billboards, which are placed at strategic points on roads and in schools. They are irresistible, drawing the attention of passersby to their images, colours and words, which are distinct, brief and easy to comprehend, retain and recall. Such billboards constantly remind youths to abstain from sex.

According to interviewees in the IDIs, most of the existing billboards and posters seen are those that were erected some years ago. A male interviewee stated, 'I see some billboards on the express with the inscription "check your HIV status" and "AIDS is real"'. Another interviewee added, "Use a condom to prevent HIV". Different posters display messages featuring people and ideas like the "ABC of AIDS", "Use a condom", "Say no to sex", "Be faithful to one sexual partner", "Know your HIV status" and "Care for people living with HIV/AIDS". These messages are posted on walls in hospitals, schools, roads, and other prominent locations where they could easily be seen by people. They display information targeted for HIV/AIDS prevention.

### *Integrated Media*

There are many HIV/AIDS media campaigns in Nigeria simultaneously conveyed through different communication channels based on themes like abstinence, stigmatization, condom use, knowing ones HIV status, among others. Multiple media are used for repetition, emphasis, easy reach to diverse publics, retention and recall of messages. The popular “zip-up” commercial made use of realistic scenarios, like night club, to transmit abstinence to young people through television, radio and billboards.

The “Stop HIV and AIDS” campaign also adopted the integrated communication model to reach young people with messages that discouraged practices promoting the spread of the virus. Information was conveyed using a combination of discussion, music, interviews, features, phone calls, and letters. The programmes were also broadcast by different media outlets, using diverse languages. The popular Nigeria slogan, “Say No to Premarital Sex”, appeared in broadcast, print and outdoor media. This five-year (2001-2006) nationwide HIV/AIDS campaign embarked on by the Nigerian Air Force Officers Wives Association (NAFOWA) also targeted youths using diverse communication devices bearing the campaign’s logo and messages. The information was disseminated through billboards, drama, t-shirt and fez-caps.

In its early occurrence in Nigeria, HIV/AIDS stigmatization was common, resulting to the culture of denial by those living and affected by it. This culture promoted its spread, impacting community health and development. Public awareness campaigns thus became apparent. To achieve quick results, the integrated communication approach was utilised as radio, television and billboard where used to transmit similar messages to diverse populations. People living with the virus publicly declared their status, encouraging others to go for the tests and live healthy. The strategy projected a positive image of carriers and affected people’s attitudes and behaviours concerning the

pandemic. The campaigns enhanced assertiveness and downplayed stigmatization. Other techniques for prevention and protection used slogans like “prevention of HIV/AIDS is as simple as ABC - Abstain, Be faithful, Condomise”. The condom campaign majorly used television, radio and billboards.

Hundreds of radio and television public service announcements (PSAs) on HIV/AIDS were mostly produced in English, Pidgin, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, and other Nigerian indigenous languages. Drama, advertisements, personal testimony, comedy, music, and celebrity endorsements presented the messages to diverse audiences. Advertisements and drama were the major entertainment instruments of HIV/AIDS communication and played significant roles in the campaign for behaviour change.

This integrated communication was not limited to traditional media as campaigns also exploited new media technologies. In 2005, a campaign was launched to raise more public awareness, taking advantage of the increasing mobile phone ownership in Nigeria. HIV/AIDS text messages were thus sent to 9 million people (BBC, 2005). The internet is also useful for the campaign. Such advanced communication technologies and social marketing skills combined with traditional approaches are productive. The techniques generate discussions that promote an enabling environment for behaviour change. Most interviewees submitted that information received from the media have positively affected their attitudes and behaviours.

### **Discussion**

Media campaigns are the easiest ways of reaching diverse people in Nigeria with HIV/AIDS information. They have distinct advantages over other strategies because of their reinforcement of messages and reach to larger populations and risk groups. Mass media campaigns keep sexual health on public agenda. They emphasize societal

responsibility for health problems, educate youth by setting discussion topics and encouraging stake holders (parents, teachers, social workers, physicians) to draw attention to safer behavioural issues.

Radio campaigns have been successful in increasing HIV knowledge and changing behaviour. The National HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Health Survey showed that most Nigerians consider all forms of mass media acceptable for reaching them with HIV/AIDS information but radio was identified the most accepted medium, followed by television and print (FMOH, 2003). Print media increased HIV/AIDS coverage and improved understanding of key issues with news reports (Fatusi and Jimoh, 2006).

The role of the media for behaviour change is enormous. They inform and affect lives. In addition to performing their primary functions of informing, educating and entertaining, the media are powerful tools for advocacy and social mobilization against the spread of HIV/AIDS. Increase in awareness increases the desire to be tested, use a condom, de-stigmatize and care for people living with the virus.

Different approaches including social marketing and integrated model were utilised to bring about human empowerment. The model is based on the convergence of social learning, diffusion of innovation, and social network theories (Odotola, 2005). It limits the spread of HIV/AIDS because messages created strong and sustained impressions in the minds of receivers, providing basis for recommended behaviour. Mass media thus set agenda for expected human behaviour.

The Agenda Setting Theory explains the correlation between the rate at which the media cover HIV/AIDS and the extent to which people think it is important to change their behaviour. Repeated

display of messages in adverts, talk shows, announcements, drama and movies informs receivers to take action based on the seriousness of the phenomenon. This occurs because mass media have the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals and structure their thinking (McCombs and Shaw, 1977). The media should however be selective in presenting content to avoid the misleading of her audience.

Accordingly, a combination of gatekeepers, editors, managers and external forces are crucial for setting agenda. These external agents may be non-media sources, government officials and significant others who have a role on media agenda. According to (Litlejohn, 2002: 321), "if the media has close relationship with the elite society, that class will probably affect the media agenda and the public agenda in turn".

HIV/AIDS awareness level in Nigeria is high. The media are utilised in sensitization, shaping behaviour and reducing its spread. Both traditional and new media are the channels adopted for educating the public towards behaviour change. The emergence of media-based NGOs, such as Journalists against AIDS and Development Communications Network, have added impetus to media-based initiatives against HIV/AIDS. Mass media in Nigeria have recorded significant progress in covering the epidemic and affecting lives (Fatusi and Jimoh 2006). Greater participation of the media in HIV/AIDS communication stem from the realization that they could exercise considerable influence on the public by increasing knowledge, changing attitudes and promoting HIV debates.

### **Conclusion**

The media of HIV/AIDS communication in Nigeria are diverse, using the integrated media approaches to induce behaviour change. Through social marketing, television, radio, film and billboard transmit attractive messages that empower the audience to make

appropriate decisions that would affect their knowledge, attitude and behaviour. Although the information was readily available in the media, contemporary trends show scarcity of HIV/AIDS on media agenda.

To have a more efficient system of communicating HIV/AIDS, government and international bodies should intensify the participatory approach and grassroots involvement in the design and implementation of HIV programmes. Rural areas should not be neglected but provided with quality information. For quantifiable, sustainable and effective results, the media should operate within a context that encourages national and local dialogue and debates that foster ownership and participation. With increasing access to the Internet in Nigeria, social media may be effective in transmitting HIV information for behaviour change.

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