

Teledrama and HIV/AIDS Awareness in Nigeria: A Critique of *Zuciyar Zinariya*, on TV Taraba

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ABSTRACT

The wave of HIV/AIDS prevalence in Nigeria could be said to have been confronted with an equally proportionate level of awareness. Government agencies, Non Governmental Organizations, Civil Based Organizations and many volunteer groups have launched awareness campaigns at various levels to reach every Nigerian with basic information about HIV/AIDS. Such awareness has taken many forms - billboards, fliers, public lectures, township hall forum, electronic media jingles and drama. Live theatre viewership is practically non-existent in the Central Nigerian Capital of Taraba State, making electronic media a portent option for reaching out to the population through visual images. This study posits that teledrama is a veritable tool in this campaign considering the high level of viewership of local television programmes especially in this part of the country. The study spotlights a production that was aired and reactions were received from a cross section of the audience via phone calls and text messages in order draw the level of their engagement and knowledge of the subject. The participant-observer perspective of the researcher attempts to identify the flaws in the production and does an impact assessment in terms of complete and accurate information to the target audience. It is the opinion of this paper that a carefully planned and well funded use of teledrama could speedily promote desired awareness on HIV/AIDS, reaching many people in all the nooks and crannies of the State at the same time.

Introduction

Teledrama is a type of drama written especially for broadcast on the television. The subjects of teledramas range across themes of romance, suspense, mystery or a combination of them. A combination of the knowledge and skill of stage drama and television production is usually sufficient to produce a teledrama.

An advantage of teledrama over stage drama is its ability to reach a larger audience in the comfort of their homes. The slow unfolding of the story of teledrama gives the audience a psychological task of expectation as the twists and turns reveal issues over time in the series. This is a contrast with live theatre shows that require physical presence at the venue of the event, thus limited in time and space. Theatres, especially in Nigeria are not common place except in major cities and where institutions of higher learning are located who run theatre arts programmes.

HIV/AIDS awareness has continued to mount and practically every opportunity is used to ensure that correct information about the virus is spread. This had led to a popular saying by campaigners, "Spread the information, not the virus", which in a nutshell urges learning about the virus to stop its spread as much as possible. Socio-demographic differences in the HIV prevalence are also observable with women, youths, and people with low level of formal education being worst affected by the epidemic (NACA 2012). Television dramas have touched on the subject in various ways and at various times, an example of which is the drama *Wetin Dey* which ran on Nigerian Television Authority as well as other local stations across Nigeria.

Jalingo metropolis, the capital of Taraba State where this study focuses does not have a performance theatre where an artiste could teach and please in a live atmosphere. Theatre-going culture is thus non-existent

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currently. The semblances of this are found in drama skits by awareness groups in schools or communities. However, these do not contain the structures of standard Theatre for Development performances that encourages audience participation. Television is a portent alternative for this purpose to reach out to the teeming viewers. Currently, two local television stations are in operation in Taraba State – NTA (Nigeria Television Authority), and TTV (Taraba Television Corporation).

Taraba Television Corporation was established on 2nd April, 1993 and got its legal backing as a corporation following an enactment of Taraba State Edict No. 2 of 1995, the same year which it was licensed by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). The station transmits from the state capital (Jalingo) on UHF Channel 22 and Bali (Booster station) on UHF Channel 25, at a frequency of 479.25MHZ. They transmit on 20 and 10 KW solid state transmitters respectively. The signal covers most parts of the state and reaches parts of neighboring Adamawa, Gombe and Plateau States. The estimated population of the State is put at above two million, while over 600,000 households are claimed to have Television sets (Kundu, 2009). Taraba TV has a high viewership primarily due to its culture of detailed news and the contents of its programmes, many of which are local and people-based.

A unique characteristic of all works of art is the disposition to criticism. Wilson (1998) describes a critic as “someone who observes the theatre and then analyzes and comments on it...a critic stands between the theatre event and the audience, though ideally the critic serves as a knowledgeable and highly sensitive audience member”(p. 67). A critic, Brook (1972) holds, serves art when he hounds out incompetence and art will be constantly menaced by great dangers without criticism. This is true since creative art requires a critical eye to commend, identify flaws and open up discussion for developing the work. The focus of this paper is to stand back from the drama production and watch from a distance and identify the high and low points and improve on future projects.

This paper attempts a critique of an episode of a drama with the theme of HIV/AIDS, to see the strengths, weaknesses and identify methods that will prove effective in using the teledrama to discuss such issues in Jalingo metropolis.

Issues on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria

The earliest reported case of HIV in the 1980's, particularly in the United States, came as a distant news to other regions of the world. In United States, “during early 1980s, most AIDS cases occurred among whites. However, cases among blacks increased steadily and by 1996, more cases occurred among blacks than any other racial/ethnic population” (CDC, 2001. P. 430). The first case of AIDS in Nigeria was reported in 1986 thereby establishing the presence of the epidemic in the country (NACA 2012). Only isolated cases however were heard of and people went about their normal lives, a culture which ordinarily put them at the risk of the ravaging effect of the virus. The culture of multiple sex partners, sharing of body piercing objects, unprotected sex and risky medical procedures was not considered an issue.

The emphasis on awareness, prevention and promotion of safe lifestyle and change of attitude in all aspects of human activities became more pronounced in the past two decades. Today, HIV/AIDS has become a common subject and an issue for concern by government and other related organizations the world over. Nigeria's commitment is demonstrated in the establishment of its National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA). The agency's visionary thrust is to make Nigeria a nation of people with functional knowledge of HIV/AIDS who provide care and support to individuals, families and communities confronted with the epidemic and facilitate all stakeholder HIV/AIDS activities in the country. Idoko (2014) observes that “Nigeria has continued to fight HIV/AIDS on all fronts with a solid commitment to meeting the millennium goal, and striving in-country to meet various partners in a collaborative manner. As a nation, Nigeria has shown tenacity for exhibiting collective passion and resolves to reach universal access targets set for 2015” (p. 1). He further advances that Nigeria's commitment to the HIV and AIDS response has been progressive in the handling of HIV/AIDS treatment and management, with a decline in HIV prevalence from 3.6% in 2007 to 3.4% in 2012. Such commitment is indeed necessary considering the impact of HIV/AIDS in the earlier years of ignorance.

One gruesome fact is that the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Epidemic has had a substantial impact on the health and economy of many nations (WHO, 2000). Mercurio (2006), advances that “over 40 million people globally are infected with HIV/AIDS (90% of which are in the developing world) and the

disease kills over three million people annually” (p. 1). This staggering reality has brought the concerns of everyone to bear on solving the global epidemic. Sub-Saharan Africa is the region of the world most severely affected by HIV and AIDS, however, “intensive and aggressive prevention programs for behavior change, condom promotion, voluntary HIV counseling and testing, and blood transfusion safety have lowered prevalence or slowed HIV transmission in several SSA countries” (CDC, 2001. P. 436).

Many factors are responsible for the high rate of HIV/AIDS cases in Nigeria. Some of these are cultural issues, stigmatization and inadequate information about the subject. Such often lead to wrong assumptions that only a certain sex are at risk of HIV (Iorapuu 2009), thus constituting major obstacles to the fight against the prevalence of the scourge in rural areas. It has been a continuous and sustained fight as the challenges are not dormant. According to Idoko (2014),

In view of the fact that an estimated 220,394 new HIV infections occurred in 2013, HIV prevention efforts have also been scaled up and there is demonstrable commitment by NACA and its development partners to reverse the spread of the epidemic, particularly in terms of curbing new infections by focusing more strategically on prevention interventions for the general population and particularly for Most at Risk Population (MARPS) and their partners who contribute more than 40% of new infections of HIV in Nigeria (p. 1).

This shows that information or lack of it is a major factor in winning the fight against HIV/AIDS especially in a country with large part of the population in areas that are not easily accessible by some methods of awareness.

In order to widen the scope of action, the Nigerian government launched the President’s Comprehensive Response Plan (PCRP), to reinvigorate the national HIV/AIDS response in Nigeria and increase domestic spending on the response. On full implementation, the PCRP is projected to reduce by 40% new HIV infections (translating into 210,000 new infections averted annually), increase by 100% of number of persons receiving ART to more than one million, reduce by 21% the number of AIDS death to 115,000 annually (translating into 92,000 deaths averted) and reduce by over 80% reduction in mother to child transmission (Idoko, 2014).



Plate 1: Map of Nigeria showing Taraba State.

The HIV prevalence in Taraba State is 5.8%, ranking twelfth on the chart (NACA 2012). The Taraba State Agency for the Control of AIDS (TACA) has been actively engaged in awareness using media jingles, erection of bill boards, working with seventeen (17) Community Based Organisations (CBOs) currently receiving a two years grant working across the sixteen (16) LGAs of the state training the most at risk populations as follows:

1. Long distance drivers (LDD)
2. Female Sex Workers (FSW)
3. Pregnant Women at antenatal clinics as entry points across the state [Prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT)].
4. Orphans and vulnerable children (OVC)
5. People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)

The intervention started in April 2014 and the beneficiaries will access the World Bank fund for the next two years. Others include in-school youth trainings called the Family Life and HIV/AIDS Education (FLHE) implemented by Ministry of Education funded by Taraba State AIDS Control Agency (TACA) creating awareness among in school youths. Out of school youths receive intervention by Ministry of Youth and Sports funded by TACA. OVC intervention is also given through the Ministry of women affairs and child development also funded by TACA. Other groups receive training including Health care workers across the health facilities in the state.

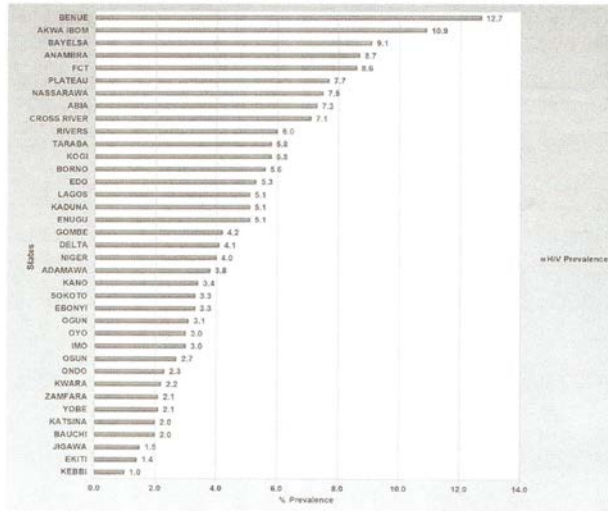


Plate 2: HIV Prevalence in Nigeria according to States. Source: NACA GARPR 2012.

HIV prevention programs in various forms contribute to healthier behaviors and reduce the number of new HIV infections. A sustained commitment to prevention on a global, national, community and personal level is necessary to further decrease the number of new infections and of persons living with HIV.

On the whole, Idoko (2014) advances that NACA with the help of government of Nigeria has currently stabilized the spread of the infection and concerted effort is being made to prevent new infections through numerous prevention programmes and strategic behavior change communications. Various development partners and stakeholders are striving to meet up the universal target of halting and reversing the trend of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.

Drama for Orientation: The TV approach

The theatre has retained its functional place in social criticism, teaching and entertaining the society in variety of ways. The art of drama has been with man and continues to serve the function of the theatre - to teach and to please. Drama's visual characteristic endows it with an ability to speak a universal language (Boh and Ukwon, 2013). The role of drama in portraying the society is to communicate intended messages in ways the audience is given direction and clarified of any existing doubt by the actions on stage. Drama mirrors the society's present state and suggests the appropriate action to take in order to turn it around for good. Brecht argues that the theatre is proficient and is able to produce simple and complex pleasure and great drama is capable of creating a more complex pleasure that is richer in communication, more contradictory and more dynamic results (cited in Willet, 1964). Theatre is thus an institution that convenes all aspects of human attitudes and societal trends, refines them and presents these in visual language that is easily understood by all. Schiller (2000) opines that:

A standing theatre would be a material advantage to a nation. It would have a great influence on the national temper and mind by helping the nation to agree in opinions and inclinations. The stage alone can do this, because it commands all human knowledge, exhausts all positions, illumines all hearts, unites all classes, and makes its way to the heart and understanding by the most popular channels (p. 253).

The channels are many and the artiste adopts that which is most effective for a given period or place. When properly designed, social revolution could occur and desired action taken as a result of effective application of drama. Boal (1998), argues that the theatre is an efficient revolutionary tool against repression.

The theatre thus frees its audience from an endless list of oppressive factors, and affords psychological freedom. This includes wrong perceptions and false information regarding issues of HIV/AIDS which the theatre could effectively combat. The contemporary theatre draws its themes from daily experiences of people in the society. The audience will naturally identify with the theme if it portrays familiar experiences and the culture the people in a given society. The theatre also is expected to identify that which will be most relevant to the intended audience at a given time, taking into consideration various factors. The theatre is most effective when it portrays issues that are current and relevant to the needs of a particular society. According to Brecht (cited in Willet, 1964), it is then that the society is able to identify with the issues of the drama thus leading to a critical attitude. The foregoing indicates the need to make possible a kind of theatre that operates based on the emerging needs of its society. The need for these innovations, Brecht opines, is to change the attitude of the audience during the theatre experience.

In response to development of events, technological advancement and changing human behaviour, the artiste in keeping to the social responsibility, responds in various ways using many methods. According to Brook (1972), "Life is moving, influences are playing on actor and audience, and other plays, other arts, the cinema, television, current events, join in the constant rewriting of history and the amending of the daily truth" (p. 19). Current demands require the theatre to be dynamic, responding to the current needs of the society it serves, in a way that the best results will be achieved. This means that the theatre will not restrict itself to the live stage or a strict form if it will serve the society efficiently. This necessitates the use of other popular channels like the electronic media for the purpose of systematic awareness on key issues. The radio and Television have been veritable tools in this regard. One advantage the television wields is the visual aspect which provides audiences with images that stick long after it is over, in sync with a Chinese proverb, "what I hear I forget; what I see, I remember".

Omosa (2009) cites a quote credited to Chief Obafemi Awolowo, one of the pioneer leaders in Nigeria, who said television should be used as a teacher and an educator and then for the information of the people. Omosa (2009) however observes that local television programme production suffer in favour of foreign programmes when he posits that:

...local production is more expensive since it is produced for television. There is also the challenge of sponsorship which makes T.V stations patronize foreign soap operas. So, to blame the local station for it is to miss the point. The globalization in the world has made it for people to access TV stations in Arab, Europe, America and so on (p. 2).

The danger in this case is that our culture and ideology are scarcely promoted even in our own local stations which should speak our minds and talk about us. The National Broadcasting Corporation, the body responsible for regulating broadcast operations in Nigeria has set standards to ensure local content in the programmes aired by various stations. In order for local productions to have the desired viewership, they must measure up to a certain standard, comparable to what is shown on foreign stations in terms of content and technical quality. This is especially necessary as there are numerous alternatives on satellite or Video CDs. The desire for standard productions is often unrealistic when one looks at the typical circumstances under which these are made.

Funding is a major challenge in local television programme production especially when sponsorship is lacking. This is especially a common issue in parts of the country like Taraba, where economic activities are not thriving when compared to other cities in Nigeria. Lack of this translates to poor equipments, low training or lack of it and low motivation which inevitably affects the quality of production.

The Form and Target of *Zuciyar Zinariya*

The teledrama *Zuciyar Zinariya*, translated "Heart of Gold", produced in 2009, is originally in Hausa language and subtitled in English. The twenty three minute drama ran as a single episode within a thirty minute weekly programme, Youth Angle, which runs on TV Taraba. The story was created by the duo of Kyantirimam Ukwen (the producer of Youth Angle) and Blessing Isah, (a National Youth Service Corps

member who was a member of the HIV/AIDS Prevention Community Service Group). The concept of the title aimed at connoting a new perception of the subject and particularly described the stereotype-free resolve of Kabiru at the end of the drama. The concept was an expanded outlook to series of awareness campaigns to schools around the metropolis by the group within the period.

The drama had only three Characters – Kabiru (acted by Kyantirimam Ukwem), Halima (acted by Blessing Isah) and Hajiya (acted by Aisha Tukur). The actors basically doubled as crew members, sourced costume and props and the location was a private residence located within Jalingo metropolis. The camera operator, Irakunyang Tapu, also doubled as the sound man. Natural lighting was utilized as much as possible by pulling back the curtain blinds. The film was edited using amateur non-linear editing software. The combination of these factors certainly did not produce the best of videos, yet the intended objective was not necessarily obscured.



Plate 3: Preparing the set for one of the scenes in the drama.

The central objective of the production was to engage in an awareness concerning HIV/AIDS using a medium that will captivate attention of viewers and pass across the message by merging entertainment, information and education. Discussion programmes were common on TV Taraba and few people watch such, considering that youths are the target of the programme. It was observed too that Hausa home videos, mostly produced in Kano, Nigeria, were popular among the population. Women in *purdah* patronize such videos either on CDs or DSTV channels. However, audience feedback was impossible in such cases even if subjects of interest are presented. Moreover, there are seldom systematic approaches to presenting subjects that will benefit the population since it is largely entertainment. *Zuciyar Zinariya* was thus aimed at breaking the jinx, opening up an audience feedback route through phone calls, text messages and participant discussions which followed the airing of the drama.

Hausa language is widely spoken in Jalingo metropolis and this informed the choice of Hausa language for the drama. The intended message could be assimilated by people who may not understand English language, giving it a wider coverage. Following the airing of the drama, a discussion segment featured counselors from the Voluntary Counseling and Testing unit of a government health facility who responded to questions regarding the subject.

A Précis of *Zuciyar Zinariya*

The story of *Zuciyar Zinariya* (Heart of Gold) centres on two young lovers, Kabiru and Halima. Kabiru had courted Halima for a while and his mother, Hajiya, who had been away on a business trip eagerly looked forward to meeting the girl that stole the heart of her only son. Halima eventually visited on Hajiya's request and when they met, Hajiya liked the young girl so much when she discovered that Halima's parents were known to her. In private, Hajiya requested Kabiru to ensure they both go for Voluntary Counseling and

Testing to ascertain their HIV status. Kabiru expressed his reservation on why his mother should suggest such but agreed to comply.

When they eventually did, Halima tested positive. Everyone was devastated, especially Hajiya, who felt that Halima had been promiscuous to have tested positive for HIV. Kabiru, determined to find out the fact, visited Halima who had locked herself up in her room, crying and had refused talking to anyone. After much persuasion, she let him in and spoke about the issue. She recalled an incident that likely led to her being infected. In a flash back, she narrated how she and her uncle, who was HIV positive, were involved in a car accident which left her seriously wounded and unconscious. Her uncle, who rescued her from the damaged vehicle was himself wounded and bleeding. She believed it was the blood contact during the incident that led to her testing positive.

Armed with this fact and believing the condition Halima found herself was not her doing, Kabiru resolved to proceed with his intention of marrying her even against Hajiya's stern opposition.

Results

Audience members (viewers) had the opportunity of participating in the discussion through calls, text messages and e-mail. Samples of the text messages are presented below:

S/N	Name	Sex	Residential Location	Medium Used	Comment
1.	Charity	F	Sabon-Gari, Jalingo	Phone call	Hajiya should not be in a hurry to make Kabiru's decision for him. Let them see what the window period will show in Kabiru's case
2.	Uche	M	Sabon Layi, Jalingo	SMS	Kabiru should forget Halima, there are more ladies to make choice from
3.	Milta	F	Magami, Jalingo	SMS	Halima should not send Kabiru away. Let him do what he wants. She didn't force him
4.	Garba	M	Mayo-goi	SMS	Halima has showed Kabiru an easy way out. Let him take it
5.	Mrs Esther J.	F	-	Phone call	Hajiya's decision is the best. She knows the pain of motherhood. Kabiru should listen to her
6.	Simon	M	Mile 6, Jalingo	Phone call	If Kabiru feels he loves Halima beyond the risk of HIV then no one should criticize him. "Love bears all things" says the Bible
7.	Atoshi	M	Abuja Phase II, Jalingo	SMS	I can never do that! Kabiru is sick in the head. HIV is HIV whichever way you look at it. Accepting to volunteer yourself for HIV is the most foolish decision to make.
8.	Jennifer	F	Abuja Phase II, Jalingo	SMS	Halima's HIV status is not her fault; it could happen to Kabiru too. That is why he is feeling that way. He is old enough to make decision. Let him do what he wants
9.	Rahila	F	ATC	SMS	Halima's decision is the best for them. The relationship has to end
10.	Ado	M	Mallum	Phone Call	Rubbish! What relationship exists between death and life? Kabiru should face the fact and separate himself from her.
11.	Sadiya	F	Ungwan Gadi	Phone Call	If Kabiru says it is not over, that's his choice
12.	Aisha	F	Tudun Wada	SMS	Halima has no fault; she saw the truth and declared it to him. If he goes ahead, it is his responsibility.
13.	Hassan	M	Angwan Yelwa	Phone Call	Love is not madness. Kabiru should remember that this ailment has no cure. Halima has ruled on the matter; let him accept her verdict.

14.	Hauwa	F	Jeka da Fari	SMS	Kabiru only intends to cause high blood pressure for Hajiya. Where is the wisdom in this choice?
15.	Musa	M	Abuja Phase I, Jalingo	SMS	Kabiru is not a kid and he knows the implication of his action. Halima should let him do what he wants.
16.	Garba	M	Abuja Auto Village	Phone Call	When a blind man suggests a stoning game, he has stepped on one. Leave Kabiru alone to do what he wants
17.	Rose	F	ATC	SMS	Kabiru is a real man. He knows the value of love
18.	Zuwaira	F	Tudun Wada	SMS	Halima is caring. She doesn't want to be the reason of him contracting the virus. There is no woman like her

Discussion

The comments and responses of the people is a sample of over eighty text messages and fifty phone calls that were received following the airing of the drama. This indicates that so many people followed the drama, understood the issues presented and were quiet aware of some issues about HIV/AIDS.

Artistically, the play ought to have resolved the issues in a conclusive manner that will define whatever intended message the drama had or alternatively made provision for a continuation that will result in that. With the seeming suspense, many who watched will not be sure of what to make of what happens to Halima and her HIV status. Will she stay alive and healthy or is that a death sentence? If Kabiru marries her, can they cohabit and have HIV free children from the union without problems? These questions were later answered in a discussion episode of the programme by two professional Counselors from the Voluntary Counseling and Testing Unit. However, many respondents preferred that these be portrayed in form of drama rather than discussion.

Technically, the drama had its challenges with equipments, finances and manpower to realize the desired standard and scope of the production. Alternative source of sponsorship ought to have been sought other than dependence on the station's support alone. With the resolve by TACA and other organizations to step up prevention of HIV/AIDS in Taraba State, they could have been willing partners in the campaign through this efficient medium.

Conclusion

The theatre when effectively wielded has been a tool for achieving results in every of man's endeavor. Drama has been used for enlightenment, orientation, teaching and entertainment. In many cases, a merger of entertainment and teaching creates conducive atmosphere for communicating intended messages to the target audience. Teledramas have the capability of reaching people in the comfort of their homes and speaking to them in the universal language of drama - action. The available statistics on HIV/AIDS prevalence do not indicate a steady win against the ravaging effect of the epidemic. There is every need to have a continuous sustained awareness on all issues regarding HIV like prevention, stigmatization and mother to child transmission. There are more people to be reached with the messages that will help in behavioral changes thus reducing the prevalence of the epidemic in Taraba State. The wide coverage of TV Taraba to the nooks and crannies of the State makes it a veritable medium to spread the message of HIV/AIDS through teledrama in the language that is familiar to the people.

Recommendations

The paper recommends the following:

- Promotion of behavior change through teledrama should be given priority in television programmes using local languages.
- TACA and other organizations at the helm of the fight against HIV/AIDS in Taraba State should encourage the use of teledrama for the campaign through sponsorship.

- Audience response should be encouraged through phone-in programmes, text messages and appearance on set to tinker with story lines in line with guided facts. This will be a form of participatory theatre on television.

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