

**A BRIEF PRESENTATION BY MR TAIWO ALLIMI, DIRECTOR GENERAL, VOICE OF NIGERIA (VON) AND CHAIRMAN, BROADCASTING ORGANISATIONS OF NIGERIA ON "HIV AND BROADCASTING" AT THE WORLD ELECTRONIC MEDIA FORUM IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND ON FRIDAY, 12 DECEMBER 2003.**

Your Excellencies

The Organisers of the Forum

Distinguished Colleagues

Eminent Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to express my grateful thanks to the organisers for inviting me to participate at the World Electronic Media Forum and to speak on the topic "HIV and Broadcasting".

My presentation will be brief and in the following format:

**1. Nigeria**

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and the largest black nation on earth with a population of over 150 million.

Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groupings and over 400 languages and indigenous dialects.

There are at least 97, 000 communities in Nigeria.

**2. Democracy**

On May 29, 1999, Nigeria returned to democratic governance after nearly 30 years of military dictatorship.

Nigeria, under the present national leadership has been laying a firm foundation for the sustenance and nurturing of democracy. To us in Nigeria, for democracy to be successful, it takes time, hard work and patience.

### **3. Broadcasting**

Nigeria commenced broadcasting over 50 years ago - with the first television station in Africa launched in 1959.

Today there are in Nigeria:

- (i) 181 Federal and State Government-Owned television and radio stations
- (ii) 95 Private-Owned television, radio, cable, satellite and direct-to-home television stations.
- (iii) There are no community radio stations in Nigeria unlike in very many African and Asian countries.

### **4. HIV in Nigeria**

The HIV epidemic in Nigeria has extended beyond the commonly classified "high-risk groups" and is now common amongst the general population.

Estimates indicate that more than 3.5 million Nigerians were infected with the virus in 2002.

With the adult prevalence rate of 5.8 percent in 2001, the nation is now threatened by an explosive growth of the epidemic.

Many more, do not know they are infected. The worst of the epidemic is yet to come as these HIV infected people may infect others and develop AIDS.

Although, the HIV prevalence level may seem low in actual numbers of persons infected, Nigeria has one of the largest HIV/AIDS epidemics in the world, fourth only to India, Ethiopia and South Africa.

HIV prevalence is not merely an urban phenomenon. In some zones in Nigeria, such as the South-West, North-East and South-South, rural infection rates are higher than urban rates.

As regards prevalence by age, HIV affects all groups, but especially those in the prime of life i.e. teenagers (15-19 years) and young adults (20-29 years) where the rate of infection ranges from 6 to 6.5 percent.

However, population sub-groups like the commercial sex workers, tuberculosis patients and those with Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD)

have a much higher rate than the general population. Other high-risk groups that are similarly affected are the injecting drug users, long distance transport workers, mines and other itinerant workers.

The AIDS scourge affects children. HIV positive parents become sick and die leaving behind orphaned children who must fend for themselves and in many cases take over parental responsibility.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the projected death toll is 55 million, while almost three-quarters of adults and children are living today with HIV or AIDS in the region.

Indeed, in most countries in Africa, the percentage of people being infected with HIV has continued to rise, while the average life expectancy is currently 47 years. Without AIDS, it would have been 62 years.

Several factors have contributed to the rapid spread of HIV in Nigeria. These include sexual networking practices such as polygamy, a high prevalence of untreated sexually transmitted infections (STIs), low condom use, poverty, low literacy, poor health status, low status of women, stigmatization, and denial of HIV infection among vulnerable groups. Nigeria is a complex mixture of diverse ethnic groups, languages, cultures, religions, and regional political groupings, all of which are major challenges for HIV prevention programs.

## **5. Government Action**

The restoration of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 brought the first signs of a strengthened national response to the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic. Data from the 1999 survey were presented to president Olusegun Obasanjo, who immediately formed a Presidential Commission on AIDS (PCA). PCA is comprised of leaders from the public and private sectors, with the President serving as Chairperson.

In early 2000, the President formed the National Action Committee on Aids (NACA), which emphasizes a multisectoral approach to AIDS. Membership includes representatives from the media, the public and private sectors, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and networks of persons living with HIV/AIDS.

## **6. Putting HIV at the Heart of Broadcasting**

- (a) We as broadcasters face tremendous challenge in the crusade against HIV virus especially in the developing world.

Undoubtedly broadcasting can help in meeting successfully this HIV virus challenge.

- (b) Stigma is the greatest threat to the control and eventual eradication of HIV/AIDS. HIV thrives in a climate where people with HIV/AIDS face blame, discrimination and isolation. Effective prevention - and care of people with AIDS - depends on deep-seated social change within societies which, instead of socially isolating people with HIV, creates a climate in which they can take a leadership role in education and prevention.
- (c) The HIV-positive people and often their families are shunned, ostracized, and denied access to social and medical services. In some extreme cases, they are killed when they reveal their status.
- (d) Therefore broadcasters need to be constantly aware of stigma and to do everything possible to fight it.

For example, Botswana recently organized a beauty contest for women who were HIV positive. Another one organized for men would be a good idea. Such events should enjoy wide coverage. Such kind programming goes a long way in fighting stigma.

- (e) A soap opera is probably the most effective means of bringing about social change. Listeners are more likely to identify with the soaps educational messages, discuss them, and perhaps act on them. South Africa and a few African countries have a lot of African soaps, on and about HIV virus.
- (f) Nigeria is emerging as a key provider of home video in Africa. It is through such home video that we can incorporate safe sex messages and other HIV/AIDS related issues.
- (g) It is not enough to broadcast HIV/AIDS exclusive programmes, but HIV/AIDS should be fused in every other aspect of programming since HIV/AIDS affects every aspect of human existence.
- (h) HIV/AIDS is not only about death and doom. It's about hope, about people fighting on, making the best of a difficult situation. It's about people living with the virus coming together to give each other support.
- (i) At the back of our minds should be the realization that HIV/AIDS does not rest or become complacent neither is it selective.

Hence Broadcasters need to be more creative in keeping the HIV/AIDS story alive, real, meaningful, informative and educative. The scourge requires that we work together if we are to control and eventually eradicate it. It is important that broadcasters work with other, from community groups, NGOs, individuals, governments and most importantly, work with people living with HIV/AIDS as partners.

## **7. Broadcasting Imperatives**

- (a) We need innovation in programme transmission including news about HIV.
- (b) We need features on radio and television across borders to sensitise leadership and citizenry.
- (c) Radio and Television stations in the developing world should have specialized beats on HIV twice a week.
- (d) Broadcasters must highlight social issues that present negative consequences that affect human resource potential and development capacities such as the HIV/AIDS virus.
- (e) With all respect, the style of Western broadcast media, which largely spread doom about HIV/AIDS in Africa and thus increase its stigma should be discontinued.
- (f) Global Broadcasters must be positive in updating knowledge and contradicting false information on and about HIV/AIDS.

## **Submissions**

I wish to submit to this workshop, the World Electronic Media Forum and the World Summit on the Information Society the following for affirmative action:

1. Broadcasting Organisations worldwide must adopt policies on health broadcasting with emphasis on HIV/AIDS and must take steps urgently to ensure the accuracy of their programming and coverage with and through consultations with the appropriate experts.

2. All Nations within the United Nations Organization must promulgate through statutory legislation, "An Emergency Health Broadcasting Charter." It should be pointed out that health goals are more achievable than many other millennium goals.
3. The UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, World Bank and other powerful donor agencies and NGOs' must commit funds for training in health education, health broadcasting and urgently create grants and bursaries for young health broadcasters from the developing world, to develop their skills.
4. Special attention should be paid to Nigeria, given its very large population and attendant consequences on Africa and most in particular West Africa, in following areas:
  - (a) Establishment of UN-Funded Community Radio System for the crusade against HIV/AIDS and strengthening democracy at the grassroots.
  - (b) Special Grants for research into finding cures for malaria, tuberculosis, polio, HIV/AIDS through Nigerian Research Institutions.
5. Nations of the world - and most in particular, Broadcasters must develop partnership that cut across traditional barriers because in the fight against HIV/AIDS, it is not enough to broadcast only straight media messages. The UNESCO, WHO, UNICEF must establish genuine partnerships for broadcasting advocacy with national, regional and local broadcast centres and institutions.

From the World Electronic Media Forum in Geneva, let us resolve to put the HIV/AIDS crusade and health issues at the heart of broadcasting.

Grateful thanks.

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and  
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