

## Chapter 24

### *SiMchezo!* magazine

### Community media making a difference

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#### Introduction

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*Even those who cannot read the magazine contribute to the discussion when we talk about issues from the (SiMchezo!) magazine. Doing this they also receive the right health messages. I remember one day we spent two hours discussing 'What are STIs'. There came out many real life examples from different people.*

Woman, Njombe

***SiMchezo!* magazine** represents an innovation in community media. It aims to saturate private and public fora of society with open talk about sensitive issues surrounding sexuality and HIV/AIDS through edutainment. Engaging people emotionally, spurring open discussion and interpersonal exchange about issues that are conventionally considered taboo by using examples from their own real lives, has proved to be one of the huge assets of *SiMchezo!* magazine. This is a prerequisite for creating supportive environments, fundamental for any behavior and wider social changes to occur in lifestyles.

*SiMchezo!* reaches out to the rural areas of Tanzania to target the semi-literate, out of school youth and their communities. The magazine is published bi-monthly and has thereby become a recurring mold of lifestyles which communicates about a set of issues in-depth and from many angles. Now a popular vehicle for information, the copies are consumed intensely –with up to 15 people reading each copy– and there is high demand for more.

*SiMchezo!* is part of the Health Information Project (HIP), a multimedia 'edutainment' initiative targeting young people with information about a range of 'cool' and healthy lifestyle issues. Sexuality, reproduction, HIV/AIDS, life skills, career opportunities, violence and drugs are all topics communicated by using real life stories and testimonials, photonovels, advice columns, and other formats that engage audiences emotionally. All HIP products, whether print or electronic, outreach events, or promotion campaigns, complement and reinforce each other. They communicate similar content and messages in different ways to different segments of the audience. FEMINA magazine has been the centre piece of the HIP since the start, with distribution focusing on secondary schools. Spin-off products and activities like *SiMchezo!* have evolved rapidly to form a comprehensive HIP multimedia package.

The HIP communication strategy develops culturally sensitive and appropriate content through interactivity with the audience and participatory production methods. HIP strives to move away from simplified messages and slogans to give young people and their guardians guidance and advice on how to apply their knowledge of HIV to their daily lives but without preaching or prescribing a single response. HIP advocates for individual decision making and personal responsibility.

Feedback studies show that HIP products like *SiMchezo!* and FEMINA have succeeded in creating an empowering 'lifestyle brand' for young Tanzanians with clearly documented change effects. Not only have the different media products created forums for open talk about sensitive issues, stirring engagement and debate, they have with their long-term recurring presence in the audiences' lives, become trendsetters, sources of comfort, critical thinking, knowledge and fun as young people grow up and have to deal with a range of serious lifestyle issues. The edutainment methodology HIP has created and put to use is working.

## Background

HIV/AIDS still represents a huge communication challenge throughout Tanzania. The issues of sexuality and HIV/AIDS continue to be surrounded by denial, silence and shame. The number of HIV positive people is increasing (currently estimated at more than 12% of the population in the age group 15-49), and there is no sign of a prevalence decline in Tanzania. Therefore there is more than ever an urgent need to promote and scale-up information and prevention activities that aim to reduce the spread of HIV through social and behavior change interventions, especially for young people while at the same time advocating for the importance of living positively, care and treatment, and stigma reduction (Richey, 2004). Yet appropriate information about the disease and related issues remains hard to access. Outdated, simple messages about A for abstinence, B for being faithful and C for condom use are still dominating, even though it is clear that these have so far failed to achieve behaviour change. People require more than just awareness and basic education, they need advice on how to deal with these issues and

make decisions in their relationships and in their social settings. Many have lost interest in understanding the virus and risk behaviour, and HIV infection is still on the increase. People continuously need to be alerted on the dangers involved, so that they internalize a way of dealing with the threat of the virus.

In Tanzania, the traditional initiation rites, *unyago na jando*, constituted modes of guided communication on sexuality and responsible behaviour for young people in most tribal contexts. These have gradually disappeared or lost their significant function as in many other African countries (Fuglesang, 1997). Parent-child communication about sexuality has always been considered inappropriate. Although extended family members –aunts, uncles and grandparents– have played this role in the past, this is breaking down as urbanization results in families that are more fragmented. Furthermore, the school system has not been able to assume the important role as a transmitter of lifeskills around sensitive sexuality issues. Implementation of sexuality education and HIV/AIDS curricula in schools has been met with reluctance and resistance on moral grounds for many years. The fear is that this type of education will encourage promiscuity. Young people are therefore still largely left to deal with the increasing influx of media images, myths and peer pressure on their own and it is difficult for them to access adequate, appropriate information or services that accommodate their unique needs. Teenage pregnancies and the high rates of new HIV infections, drug and alcohol abuse are the result.

In Tanzania, the political commitment to help fight the HIV epidemic was slow to emerge. Yet such commitment is vital as HIV is not just a biomedical and health problem but a political and cultural problem as well as a socio-economic problem. Since 2001 the Tanzania AIDS Commission (TACAIDS) has been operating under the Office of the Prime Minister. This has enhanced prominence of the issue on the government agenda, but huge challenges still lie ahead to mobilize society for prevention of new infections and support of those children, youth and adults who are affected and infected. Serious efforts need to be made to reduce stigma, denial, and discrimination. People have to understand that there is a difference between HIV and AIDS and that people can live positively with HIV for many years without getting AIDS. People are still reluctant to test voluntarily to find out their HIV status, and testing facilities are not widely available. Many cases are therefore not reported, and statistics are inconsistent. The provision of life-prolonging drugs, ARVs, on a wider scale in 2004 as part of the government's new care and treatment plan, is a further challenge. In Tanzania, as in so many other countries on the continent, civil society organisations have played a very important role in spearheading and pioneering prevention work as well as HIV care and treatment, and will have a crucial role to play also in the coming years. Many so called behaviour change, care and support interventions are now in place in the country. However, more synergy between initiatives is needed. There has to be a more concerted effort to encourage partnerships and collaboration between organizations, between the government and the civil soci-

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With globalization and a growing market economy in Tanzania, media and information technology has become more accessible, and dissemination and distribution facilities have improved. This has made it possible to increasingly work through and develop new media vehicles for HIV communication. If content is culturally relevant, linked and rooted in the face-to-face encounters of everyday life, reinforcing and creating legitimacy around these, media communication has vast potential to reach large audiences and effect positive social change. The HIP multimedia lifestyle initiative is a prominent example.

### HIP products and strategy

HIP produces four regular, recurring media vehicles as well as other supportive activities and materials:

- 1 *FEMINA Magazine* 60 pages, English/Swahili language, full-color, quarterly. Targets youth, particularly in secondary school settings. 2004 reached 92,000 copies. Distributed to over 1,200 schools which compose most of the secondary schools in Tanzania, 120 like minded NGOs and at commercial outlets in urban areas. Covers a broad range of lifestyle issues.
- 2 *FEMINA TV Talk Show*. 30 minute, Swahili language, weekly talk show, with in-studio, out-of-studio and comedy segments. Young hostess invites guests –youth, celebrities, topic experts, politicians to the studio. At other times the show is shot out in the field. The first for and by youth. The audience is youth and their families across Tanzania, particularly in urban areas. Aired on the private TV channels (Channel 10 and CTN). Interactive through SMS responses and contributions.
- 3 *Si Mchezo! Magazine*. 32 pages, bi-monthly Swahili language, full-colour. Targeted audience is rural, out-of-school, semi-literate youth aged 15-30 and their communities. Print run in 2004 reached 76,000 with an estimated reader of 15 persons per copy. Most distributed free of charge through large scale employers, NGOs and local government, paid subscriptions to workplaces and large organizations. The 5 southern regions of Tanzania have been in focus up till 2004, but distribution and editorial collection is gradually expanding to other regions as demand continues to grow.
- 4 <[www.chezasalama.com](http://www.chezasalama.com)> Interactive, bilingual (English and Swahili), regularly updated (weekly) website. Mirrors the content of

other HIP products. The targeted audience is Swahili and English speaking youth that can be reached over the World Wide Web.

- 5 *FEMINA User Guide*. A one-off publication to help facilitate the use of FEMINA magazine as a teaching and learning tool in schools, communities and clubs. Contains ideas for activities, exercises and reflections.
- 6 *Booklets*. Short, less than 50 pages, one-off publications covering specific themes. The audience is the general public, or depending on the nature of the publication. So far, four booklets: AIDS in our community, Living Positively with HIV/AIDS, 26 testimonials of PLHA, and a popularized version of the national HIV/AIDS policy.
- 7 *Community Mobilization*. Road shows, school visits and clubs. The HIP team travels out to the regions to meet the audience in communities and schools all over the country. This promotes the HIP lifestyle further. The road shows include drama, music, question-and-answer sessions about sexuality and living positively with HIV, and offers opportunities for exchange but also helps the HIP team monitor use of the magazine in the community and school settings. HIP also encourages the formation of clubs, voluntary reading and discussion fora in and out of school where community action is also encouraged.
- 8 *Public relation and promotion*. Media campaigns, billboards, posters, postcards, as well as more traditional media such as wall murals, are also being used.

The Health Information Project (HIP) was set up in 1999 in order to find new creative and strategic ways of communicating about the issues at the core of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Tanzania<sup>1</sup>. HIP sought to develop youth-friendly and culturally sensitive formats and content for communication where interactivity with the audience, continuous, long-term presence, access and scale were to be the main concerns.

Strategic communication to enhance social and behaviour change is very important as it has the potential to slow down if not stop the epidemic. We know however, that changing social and behaviour patterns is very difficult. Engaging people and communities in adopting and adapting new ideas about their social relations, to help them internalize these ideas and then express them in new practices/changed behaviour, is a huge challenge.

<sup>1</sup> The HIP is implemented by East African Development Communication Foundation (EADCF), also known as the Ngoma Foundation. The core HIP project is funded by SIDA, with funding for expansion and spin-off activities from NORAD, GTZ, USAID, and UNAIDS, AYA, FHI, RFE, Foundation for Civil Society.

HIP believes in the power of entertainment, hence it builds on an entertainment-education strategy. The initiative aims to entertain, educate and empower youth in appealing, high quality formats that mirror contemporary youth culture and language, lifestyle and aspirations. Entertainment-education appeals to the emotions and makes people open and receptive to the facts that are communicated. While most initiatives that use the entertainment-education methodology use the fictional drama to communicate, HIP uses docudrama which is rooted in journalistic tradition, real life testimonials and human interest stories. Anyone who has a story to tell, whether celebrity or street vendor, will be heard through interviews, testimonials, letters and short essays from readers. Research shows that this narrative approach is not experienced as didactic or preachy by young audiences, as it mirrors people and language like themselves. The magazine's visual presentation and photography follow the same principles. HIP does not use professional models but ordinary youth to model or simply portray themselves. HIP products engage the audience further because consumption is a pleasurable activity. They appreciate the quality paper and print, the playful design and decoration, the colour and visual images, and they appreciate the sensation of the open talk about normally secret issues. The approach developed by HIP has a broad popular appeal.

Common to all the HIP products is an *interactive and participatory production process* which ensures that young people's 'voices' and concerns become the sounding board. HIP is constantly learning from its audience, young people contribute with their ideas and experiences and pose for the photographs. Constant interaction with young people through editorial collection in the field, 'formative research' in focused groups at the HIP offices or in their own settings like schools, youth centres or rural communities, is important. This provides opportunity for texts, story lines, interpretation of articles, images to use, etc., to be discussed. Outreach activities including 'roadshows' in selected communities with large scale public question-and-answer sessions about living positively with HIV, sexuality and risk is another forum for interaction. The *constant feedback* generated in such interaction enables the editorial team to refine messages, explore new angles to topics, sharpen the design and identify gaps in knowledge. The process also has a strong empowering function for those involved and enhances their own understanding of the issues at hand. Conducting this kind of on-going research is one of the core elements of the HIP and is essential to the edutainment approach.

### Theoretical grounding

HIV prevention programmes have to be guided by communication strategies and be *grounded in theory* and the local socio-cultural context. Furthermore, they need to be based on a multidisciplinary approach. The complexity of the issues involved entails that a holistic approach is necessary for understanding.

HIP and its entertainment-education strategy are grounded in the classic theories of behaviour change communication. At the heart of understanding

this process is Bandura's social learning theory, which states that human learning can occur through observing media role models. This type of learning can be as effective as experiential learning. *Role modelling* is core to the HIP approach. Identifying with role models is an emotional process, and the significance of emotions in HIV prevention can not be underestimated. The epidemic spreads mainly through sexual relationships, which implies that feelings of romance and desire are usually involved. Transmission of the virus is not just a rational process in which an individual's knowledge of consequences guides that individual's actions. Entertainment-education appeals to the emotions and makes people open and receptive to the facts as well as to the emotional dilemmas that are communicated. For this reason entertainment-education interventions seem to be particularly appropriate for behaviour change communication, and they have proved to be very effective in motivating preventive action (Singhal and Rogers, 2003).

However, social learning theory is primarily concerned with individual-oriented behaviour change. HIP finds this limiting and is concerned as well with context and agency. The theories of participation and action by Paulo Freire have therefore also inspired the HIP approach. The principles of dialogue, interaction, problem posing, reflection and conscientization are fundamental to empowerment and social change. The HIP vehicles are designed to activate readers, individually but also collectively to think critically, to take control of their lives and find solutions rather than passively allowing action to happen to them. As Freire argued, people have to be empowered to imagine change, and to practice it. They have to learn to analyze social problems and transform reality through direct action. HIP strives to understand the social and cultural context of behaviours and has therefore a larger social change agenda.

Insights particularly from anthropology are consequently fundamental to the HIP philosophy. The initiative is concerned with people's whole lifestyle and how gender and power is culturally constructed (Caplan, 1987). Understanding traditional rituals and symbolic meanings is fundamental; the traditional initiation rites have always been the mode of transmitting knowledge about sexuality to youth in transition to adulthood in tribal societies. An understanding of how young people search for identity and meaning in a rapidly changing world and their creation of and participation in local and global 'youth cultures' is also important. Furthermore, an understanding of their engagement with and interpretation of the mass media is key (Fuglesang, 1994). Whether living in rural or urban areas of Tanzania young people today acquire a lot of their knowledge of issues relating to sexuality from their peers, and increasingly from the mass media (Fuglesang, 1997; Rwebangira and Liljeström et al, 1998). Sex is still a taboo topic for parent/child communication. However, the flow of media messages is saturated with contradictory and sensational images of sex, love and relationships. Young people's fascination with the media and with the entertainment industry can therefore be seen as a resource that can effectively be used to communicate more pro-social messages.

HIP is also inspired by theories of visual literacy, an understanding of how audiences interpret visual images; photos, photo-novels and cartoons are key to the development of appropriate, effective content form (Fuglesang, 1982).

### Strategic partnerships

Creating *strategic partnerships* that can reinforce the HIP media-based messages in interpersonal communication is important. Agreements are set up with like-minded NGOs, secondary schools, district government and large scale employers working on the ground. In order for the print products, especially, to reach the intended audience, it is essential to have such entry points to local communities. The strategy is to encourage products such as FEMINA magazine and *SiMchezo!* magazine, even video tapes of the TV Talk Show, to be used by these local organizations in the context of their work through peer educators, community based distributors, and workplace programs. Distribution and dissemination of the HIP products is a huge challenge, and partners like the ones mentioned are a key to the distribution system that HIP has built up to ensure that the magazines reach all targeted destination. A commercially based distribution system that builds on newspaper vendors around the country has also been built up to ensure that the products are transported to the many organizations and schools that are on our distribution list in every region of Tanzania.

The HIP products all highlight the work of its partner organizations in *content*. They are the topic experts on specialized issues that HIP editors and producers draw on when doing research and interviewing experts. Advertising their activities and their services is also key. This ensures a 'link to services', essential in any sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention program. HIP has made efforts to empower PHLAs and their interest organizations by employing individuals to work with the HIP team. An HIV positive woman has her own column in the FEMINA magazine where she openly shares her thoughts and fears about living positively, death, stigma, love and hope. She and other HIV positive also travel with the HIP road-show team around the country and speak to the public face to face. HIP has made the HIV positive community in Tanzania visible, by integrating them systematically into media products and other activities.

The *corporate sector* is valuable for the HIP initiative, both in terms of image and lessons to be learnt from marketing, distribution, publishing, but also for extra income generation. HIP products are used in corporate as well as government workplaces. A program component which has grown substantially during the past years, generating sponsorship and income through sales of advertisements but also more printed copies, has become a key element, generating a 'cost-sharing' on win win principles and fostering social responsibility in the business community.

Without *political leadership*, the fight against HIV/AIDS will fail. HIP systematically seeks out top political leaders for interviews. FEMINA TV Talk Show has collaborated with Prime Minister Fredrick Sumaye in producing a show for the World AIDS Day about children affected or infected by HIV. Mama Karume, and



Makamba, the Regional Commissioner of Dar es Salaam, have both featured in the FEMINA magazine. All parliamentarians regularly receive copies of the FEMINA HIP magazine in Parliament (Bunge) in Dodoma, and we have made efforts to engage them in the fight against HIV. HIP is also collaborating with the Ministry of Education, Institute of Curriculum Development, in helping them train teachers and introduce the Family Life Education curriculum in secondary schools. HIP is also involved in editing students' books for this curriculum. District and regional government officials are partners in that they are key in the distribution and dissemination of the HIP products all over Tanzania. TACAIDS has been a partner on recent projects, and HIP recently made a popular version of the national HIV strategy with support from them.

### ***SiMchezo!* magazine production activities**

The rural areas of Tanzania are vast, and still largely underserved; there is little information material available and the rural way of life is seldom reflected in the media. The challenge is to reach out to these areas with the ambition to educate and mobilize people to start talking openly and to take on a healthy lifestyle agenda in the context of HIV/AIDS. *SiMchezo!* magazine was designed and set up as a spin-off to FEMINA magazine in 2002, to do just this. The entry point is youth, but the magazine also engages other 'gatekeepers' like parents, local leaders and consequently the broader community. The idea was to develop a community media vehicle that has a distinct rural identity and which mirrors the rural way of life in Tanzania and how people in such setting think and deal with issues relating to sexuality, their lifestyles and the HIV epidemic. The media vehicle is for and by the rural community.

Since its launch in 2002 the *SiMchezo!* magazine has grown steadily in popularity and in numbers, began with 10,000 copies in three districts in southern Tanzania. HIP has been able to sustain this enthusiasm by increasing the print run. Beginning December 2004 HIP is printing 76,500 copies of the magazine. Distribution has been focused in the five southernmost regions of Tanzania.

An innovative community based method of editorial collection has been developed for *SiMchezo!* The two editors travel out to selected rural areas with a laptop and digital camera to collect stories. The production builds on such modern production technology, which has simplified and transformed editorial work. Editors meet with various youth groups, partner organizations and community members and get ideas for story lines. Scripts for photo-novels are chiselled out with the help of the community members, who also act and pose as models for the photographs. The script and photos are written, shot, edited and basically completed within a day for one article or photo-novel. The language is 100% simple, direct, straightforward Swahili, vernacular is even used. Local NGOs, CBOs, and key individuals also help to recommend issues and persons to contact, and generally help to facilitate constant feedback and dialogue with *SiMchezo!*'s audiences.

A variety of topics on sexuality, general health and lifestyles are covered in each *SiMchezo!* issue, i.e. pregnancy prevention, STIs, and HIV/AIDS; gender; girls education; human rights; alcohol/drug abuse; violence; religion/spirituality; living with HIV/AIDS; care and support for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS; peer pressure; stigma and discrimination; and communication between parents and youth. Content is shaped using formats such as personal testimonial, news from the regions, income generation and money management, photo-novel, music top-ten, peer and expert advice, case studies of community change, health services available, letters from readers, 'your voice', and cartoon story.

Importantly, *SiMchezo!* has a 'Chezasalama' page. The slogan 'play/dance it safe, which HIP used for one of its information and promotion campaigns is about a holistic healthy lifestyle. The page provides information on safer sex practices and activities youth can do when abstaining from sexual intercourse. Furthermore, *SiMchezo!* and HIP has launched the Beyond ABC campaign. For years the key HIV prevention slogans has been the ABC; A for abstention, B for being faithful and C for using condoms. HIP believes it is high time we go beyond this and learn the other letters of the sexual health alphabet. We need to become fully literate. We need to learn the H for hugging, the K for kissing, the M for masturbation, the O for oral sex. The campaign was launched through all HIP products, and has created waves of support and engaged young as well as old *SiMchezo!* readers. In spite of the fact that some of the topics such as masturbation are sensitive, people agree that it is a safer sex practice that needs to be talked about and even encouraged in the context of abstention from sex and a search for safer sex options. Parents have stated they would rather have HIP promote masturbation than condoms when addressing young people.

The last time content format of *SiMchezo!* was reviewed, some significant changes were made. Eight new pages were added to the magazine (24>32) to give room for expansion of columns like 'your voice' from one to two pages, due to enthusiasm and demand. Introduction of money management and income generation page was also due to demand. Even more important than HIV/AIDS in many people's opinion is poverty. Links between poverty and spread of HIV/AIDS are well documented. Introduction of the '*Tulichovuna*' ('that which we have harvested') page was the experience with the cover story. Since the start, the cover story has featured profiles of ordinary youth who have made a change in their life, role modeling individual behaviour change. '*Tulichovuna*' does the same for the community level –it gives examples of people in communities working together to achieve change. This offers inspiration to others.

Introduction of '*Pasipo na Daktari*', general health topics such as clean water, malaria, fever and dehydration, was also done after requests from readers.

In order for *SiMchezo!* magazine to reach its intended audience in the best possible way, it is essential to have an entry point into the local communities. This point has varied according to the situation, but the magazine always works in the spirit of partnership. For example in Iringa Region, which has been one of

the focal regions for *SiMchezo!* distribution since the beginning of the magazine. Large-scale employers at tea and wattle estates introduced the magazine to their workforces and the surrounding communities. In other areas, district and regional officials have been instrumental in linking *SiMchezo!* with the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) including faith-based organizations. The magazine has also been distributed at local clinics, hospitals and HIV testing facilities.

HIP encourages local organizations to use the magazine as part of peer education and community outreach efforts, e.g., workshops, festivals and sports programs. Experience shows that acceptance of *SiMchezo!* magazine is very positive when readers receive 'backup' from local peer educators or health staff who can help explain and discuss content, and respond to questions that may arise. The magazine in turn reports on partner activities and, for instance, their peer education work. The magazine focuses also on documenting and highlighting in a positive way different community actions, i.e. steps that communities are taking to safeguard young people, such as changing behaviors/customs that put them at risk of pregnancy, STIs and HIV, as we shall see below.

Every quarter, *SiMchezo!* and the HIP team organize community outreach events in collaboration with local organizations. The two editors plus other HIP team members travel to the regions, with stand up comedians or drama groups, and a HIV positive woman who does question-and-answer sessions, to conduct four hour 'roadshows'. Such events serve to strengthen the magazine's relationship with its readers in many ways. Here HIP speaks not only to the youth but to the whole community. The outreach events also directly inform content development for the magazine. They also stimulate the magazine's participatory production process and monitoring and evaluation efforts. It is easier to rally people to participate when they have had a big public presentation of the magazine and the production team behind it. They appreciate to see the editors and feel that they are part of the production process.

### ***SiMchezo!* results**

Monitoring, evaluation and documentation is key to the HIP communication strategy. HIP engages in extensive formative and process oriented research, and knowledge about the magazine's effect and impact is of vital importance for the overall project and funders, but also for the continued relevance of the editorial content. HIP has monitored the previous two phases of *SiMchezo!* closely using a triangulation of methods, including quantitative surveys, focus groups discussions, analysis of letters and interviews with key people in the field. As part of its second phase, a quantitative survey is underway using Ruvuma Region as the study site. Focus group discussions were conducted at the same site, as well as from Iringa and Mtwara Regions. Below we shall explore some of the findings from these focus group discussions.

Readers express that they place a high level of trust in *SiMchezo!* magazine; they are confident that the information contained in the magazine is true and accurate. This is significant because people are often confused, even paralyzed by the myths and conflicting messages they hear elsewhere. Why do they trust *SiMchezo!*? HIP attributes the strong confidence in and 'ownership' of the magazine to the production approach, the regular interaction between the readers and the editorial team –the readers are involved in the production, they see the editors and they meet the team. It reflects their reality, speaks their language, they are given a voice and *SiMchezo!* doesn't preach, it respects the readers' need for information and capacity to be responsible and make their own decisions. The fact that people believe that the magazine provides 'facts' and 'evidence' enables us to say that it has been effective in correcting misconceptions about the difference between HIV and AIDS, and other related myths around modes of transmission, the efficacy of the condom, and masturbation. The magazine's clear and direct language and appealing way of presenting issues help accentuate this impression in feedback.

### **Open talk and conducive atmosphere**

A key objective of *SiMchezo!* is to encourage open talk and exchange among people, e.g between partners, parents and adolescents. Discussion is fundamental to prevention work; through such exchanges people revisit their views, learn new things and are encouraged to act to create an open environment where individual behaviour change is possible. The *SiMchezo!* magazine has been very effective in stimulating discussion about HIV and breaking the silence around the issue. It has contributed to a conducive atmosphere for change at the community level. As we shall see, there are many examples of how the magazine has initiated both individual and collective change processes in communities where the magazine has been distributed.

Some of the testimonial cover stories on *SiMchezo!* come from youth who have been so inspired and informed by the magazine that they have changed habits of behavior to the better and now want to share their story with other readers to talk about their experiences and what triggered them to change and to sustain that behaviour change. Such sharing of experiences is very powerful and other youth tell us that they again have been inspired to change by reading the stories of others, i.e. role modeling. The following letter is revealing:

*'SiMchezo!* has changed my thinking'.

I am glad to appear in *SiMchezo!* testifying how the magazine has completely changed my thinking in as far as secondary abstinence is concerned. Educators have always been preaching on the importance of secondary abstinence and I have read a number of publications on that particular subject. However, I never thought it was possible for one to stop sex after he/she has been 'addicted to it' until when I read a true story by

Nehemia Sanga, of Makete, in *SiMchezo!* issue 15. The true story convinced me to believe that it was possible to practice secondary abstinence and it gave me confidence that I can also do it!

The minute I read the testimony, I decided that I am also going to change and I am glad I did! I used to have sex at least thrice a week but I have now managed to remain abstinent for almost two months and a half now! This is fantastic and I am sure I will make it. I commend *SiMchezo!* for this strategy of giving us real life stories because they work more than mere words. *SiMchezo!* has also been publishing articles on policies affecting youths and the rights of youths, something that has not only informed me about my rights but also empowered me to demand them.

I commend you for the fantastic job.

Young man, *Tunduru*

Because issues are openly discussed in the magazine by people from their own community who are the models, people are particularly interested. They talk about what they have read in the magazine. The magazine is clearly an ice breaker; it brings sensitive issues out into the open and reduces the shame of talking about sexuality and the underlying causes of HIV/AIDS. The magazine triggers open discussion in workplaces, among groups of people as well as among partners.

Before the magazine it was difficult to communicate with your friend on issues of sexuality and STIs, but you give someone the magazine and then you inquire what he/she has grasped from it, they talk openly without hiding anything. In this way you realize that he/she gets a lot of useful information.

Young man, *Madoda tea estate, Njombe*

During the discussion at work, in the Ushauri Wangu (my advice page), people agree that it is not always necessary to have sex when you erect. There are other ways like masturbation. I like this comment, and people now say that the magazine addresses innermost issues which were not possible to be talked openly about in the past.

Man, *Njombe*

HIP staff has also experienced that communities where *SiMchezo!* is accessible discuss issues raised in *SiMchezo!* and are taking collective action in different ways. In Tandahimba district in Mtwara region, the community made, after the topic was discussed in *SiMchezo!*, a collective decision to ban dance rituals at night as there was a tendency for couples to pair off and engage in risky sex after the dance. The dances are still performed, but only during the day! This is one example of how *SiMchezo!* content influences community cooperation and collective problem solving and stimulates collective initiatives to fight HIV/AIDS.

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People express that they can talk with confidence for they have the facts from the magazine get answers to some of their problems and queries about STIs, condom use or menstrual cycle, the evidence as they say. Talk becomes empowering, as they have the evidence from the magazine.

Not all readers of course feel comfortable in the beginning with the open, straight forward way the topics are presented in *SiMchezo!* They are simply not used to it and this has created intense discussion between people with different views. A few stated that they used to think it 'crazy' to talk too openly about STIs in front of other people in public, but after reading about it in the magazine they realized that it may not be so bad to do it. Because the magazine is trusted, a legitimacy is therefore created when it comes to talking openly in a certain way.

After you have brought the *SiMchezo!* magazine here it is now easy for people to communicate on STIs easily. You know there were these health messages for quite long time now with low impact. Now I can say people can discuss openly about STIs. Other people cannot talk to their friends even if they have problems, but after reading the magazine you see them discuss about the magazine content.

Young man, *Tanwat Factory, Njombe*

Among couples or sexual partners, many are taking the courage to speak up with their partners after reading articles in *SiMchezo!* that encourage couples to do just that.

The magazine has helped us discuss things with our sexual partners. At first it was difficult to convince my partner to use condom, because I was afraid to talk to him. But now I can buy condoms and I have at home. I tell my fellow friends to speak out to their sexual partners.

Woman, *Maganga Tea Estate, Mafinga*

The qualitative data clearly shows that people of all ages enjoy *SiMchezo!* and benefit from its messages. The magazine appeals to adults as well as youth because it tackles real life issues in their own rural areas. People engage intensively with *SiMchezo!* contents. Workers at the plantation estates of Mufindi and Tanwat in Iringa Region and people in the surrounding communities have since the start of the magazine project engaged in intense discussions about the contents. The demand for the magazine has increased steadily. People come early in the month to request copies from the local health centers from where the magazine is distributed, and come with an increased repertoire of questions. There is according to Betty Liduke, the matron of the Tanwat company hospital, a renewed interest in voluntary HIV testing and STI treatment since *SiMchezo!* magazine has been distributed in that district.

We stay at a far village, almost 20km from here (Idetero Tea Estate). We usually carry copies of the magazine to our families and friends on the weekends. Many people in our village can access the magazine now. We discuss contents of the magazine. They really love it.

Man, *Idetero Tea Estate*

## Parent/child communication

The communication gap between adolescents and their parents greatly benefits from the presence of *SiMchezo!* magazine as well. Usually adults find it difficult to respond to adolescents' questions and concerns, due to the sensitivity of the issues, and other socio-cultural barriers. This hinders open and frank discussions between elders and youth. Often adolescents are met with distrust, suspicion, anger, hostility or just silence when they approach adults for information and guidance, regardless of whether they are sexually active.

The magazine has become a Tool for parents. By giving the *SiMchezo!* magazine to them they have communicated even if they are not yet ready to discuss sex with their children. But feedback shows that parents feel that information and guidance important and see the magazine as helping them in that role. According to feedback *SiMchezo!* is the only way many parents can communicate with their daughters and sons. Some say that they realize that the young people need the information and that they are not to blame for getting into trouble because they themselves as parents have left it to the government and the schools to teach them and it's not being done. Furthermore, some admit they don't stay close to their children and listen to their problems. They agree that they should try to, as it is encouraged in the magazine.

I have my daughter of 11 years old, she is in Standard Five. At first, I was not ready for her to read the magazine. I left the magazine in my bedroom. To my surprise I met her reading the magazine, I didn't say anything to her. Later she discovered that I had received a new issue of the magazine and she asked for it. I was puzzled, but I knew that the information in the magazine is useful to her.

Father, *Tanwat estate, Njombe*

The magazine increases communication among people here in Njombe. According to African culture, men cannot talk to their daughters on issues relating to sexuality and STI. Some of the parents have the courage to talk to their daughters and sons; it is good, but for those who cannot talk it then they should use the magazine to communicate.

Man, *Kibena Tea Estate, Njombe*

### 400 | Use by peer educators

At Tanwat estate, HIV workplace peer educators use *SiMchezo!* as part of their education program. For them the magazine becomes a reference material and something they can use as an entrypoint to discussion. They highly appreciate the magazine and say that it creates status and legitimacy for them in their job to use and be associated with *SiMchezo!*

## Conclusion

In more ways than one *SiMchezo!* has become one of the most significant vehicles of the HIP multimedia initiative. With it, HIP is reaching out to the rural youth, in underserved communities around Tanzania where information and support are desperately needed. The magazine clearly has effect in the communities where it is distributed. It creates trust and open talk and engagement with sense-making of sensitive issues. This all contributes to creating a supportive environment which is fundamental for any behaviour and wider social changes to occur. Interpersonal communication is clearly spurred among partners, but even between parents and children. It is further used as an education tool by the HIV peer educators of many organizations. The ever growing demand for copies is also an indicator of effect.

The HIP multimedia intervention has gone beyond the boundaries of its main information agenda, HIV/AIDS, to include a whole array of health lifestyles issues, including those of democracy, voluntarism, and civil rights. The *SiMchezo!* greatly contributes to the notion of HIP becoming an empowering lifestyle brand, a source of friendship and support for young people growing up in Tanzania today. The long-term, recurring feature of the media vehicles greatly contributes to make this happen. A letter from a young girl, Morogoro, sums it up:

Dear Editor, I would like to congratulate you on what you're doing, surely it is so fantastic... Truly, *SiMchezo!* has increased my awareness about life and how to face it. I face so many difficulties but *SiMchezo!* has made it simpler. Thanks again and God Bless you.

The HIP approach stands on the shoulders of what other initiatives have done in the field of entertainment-education worldwide, having adopted and adapted ideas. HIP has developed its own distinct approach. The pioneering participatory production process of *SiMchezo!* with modern digital technology, which mostly takes place in the 'field' in the rural areas with the participation of local youth groups, is helping HIP refine and fine tune its overall methodology and approach. The docudrama approach used in the magazine is setting a trend for other youth media in the region. HIP receives many requests for information about how it works when producing the edutainment vehicles. As HIP scales up and expands during the coming years as a response to its popular reception, the project will also increasingly share its experiences by organizing regular regional training courses in the HIP edutainment methodology and document the communication



strategy used. HIP is a an example of an initiative rooted in the tradition of communication for development. The HIP products model new culturally appropriate realities and challenges oppressive power structures in society. HIP believes that for people to take prevention seriously and internalize protective ways of dealing with HIV, you have to engage them in discussion and sense making about their whole lifestyle and that of their communities.