



Engaging culture for effective responses to HIV and AIDS

Outline

- What is culture?
- International development frameworks and culture
- Addressing culture in practice
- Traditional healers
- Expressive and artistic projects
- Effectiveness in engaging culture
- Giving culture more attention in HIV programmes

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What is Culture?

‘the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterise a social group...not only the arts and letters but also modes of life, fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.’

(Mexico Declaration on Cultural Policies, Unesco 1982)

Culture is ‘one of the...most complicated words in the English language’

(Raymond Williams, 1976)

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What is Culture?

- All aspects of everyday life have a communicative cultural dimension: food, cloths, ‘material culture’, everyday activities, practices and rituals

- Culture is dynamic and ‘invented tradition’ – a resource, not a ‘barrier’

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Why address culture?

Important in relation to HIV and AIDS

- key part of people’s way of life and doing things including notions of morality, health and illness, sexuality and gender
- ‘social drivers’ of epidemic: stigma and discrimination, gender inequity
- prevention issues: male circumcision, multiple concurrent partnerships
- important as part of respect for people and their participation and involvement in national responses

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Culture of development

- Development as a set of processes and assumptions about social change and particular institutions – also has a culture
- Emphasis on technical solutions and external expertise
- Suspicion of alternative views of health and medicine
- What counts as evidence, whose opinions matter
- Participatory workshops - rituals of development



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Culture in development?

- UNESCO world decade on culture 1986-1997
- UNAIDS communication framework 1999 – five contexts include culture
- UNESCO and UNAIDS Cultural approach to prevention and care (2000)
- UNFPA 2004 work on culturally sensitive projects
- Africa Commission (2005) – culture central
- UK Department for International Development DFID HIV communication framework (2005)
- Recognition in HIV communication literature

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Engaging culture in practice

- Many organisations using cultural approaches – *Creative Exchange* 'Routemapping' study (2002-3) found 350 projects
- Lack of systematic approach
- Culture as beliefs and ways of life (anthropology)
- Culture as 'arts' and expressive traditions
- *Creative Exchange* framework: Culture as context, content, method, expression

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Engaging culture in practice

Creative Exchange - towards a conceptual framework for culture in development - culture as:

- **context** – the wider social environment and setting
- **content** – local cultural practices, beliefs and processes
- **method** – cultural and creative communication activities (popular theatre, music, dance, visual media, symbols)
- **expression** – creative elements of culture linked to beliefs, attitudes and emotions, ways of engaging the world and imagining the future.

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Traditional healers

- In developing countries, first contact for health for 70-80%
- Key counselling and support role
- Commonalities between northern biomedical concepts and 'indigenous contagion theory' – and potential for collaboration (Green, 1999)
- Little collaboration in practice and minimal evaluation (UNAIDS, 2000)
- Alma Ata Declaration on 'Health for All' (1978), recognised 'unified action of all health systems' and research into alternative health traditions such as Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine



Artistic cultural projects

- Widespread use of theatre, songs, art...
- Tend to use for messaging, rather than promoting process of debate and reflection.
- Potential to deepen participation and use creative local methods and idioms for expression
- Rich communication traditions that can engage emotions, experience and people's creativity



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Effectiveness?

- World Bank case studies of effective engagement – sex workers in Kolkata, famine relief in Sudan,
- alternative cleansing rights in Zambia, Malawi, Salvation Army
- Many arts and culture initiatives
- Little explicit evaluation of engaging culture
- Need for appropriate evaluation tools
- 'Affectiveness' - engaging the emotions in cultural approaches – *Creative Exchange* network in Kenya:

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Where do we go from here?

- Culture must be taken seriously and explicitly engaged
- Need clear guidelines on how to engage complexities of culture in development in practice
- Better evaluation methods
- Further investment, research, learning and action needed to match the commitment on paper with concrete action
- Central importance to development that puts people as agents of their own change at the centre



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Thank you

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