Society

Language key in delivering AIDS message
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"Reaching the Unreached: A Practical Guide to Producing HIV and AIDS Prevention Audio-Visual Material in Ethnic Minority Language" was released on Feb 28, 2011.

Ethnic groups account for only 8% of the total Chinese population, but constitute 20% of the total reported cases of HIV and AIDS. Populations such as the Jingpo, Dai and Wa are at disproportionate risk of contracting the AIDS virus.

Living in remote frontier areas, and often unable to speak, read, or write standard Chinese, these populations are frequently not reached effectively by standard HIV prevention programs.

The only effective way to reach these populations is through culturally and linguistically appropriate prevention materials such as radio shows, TV soap operas, comics and movies in their own languages. Research has shown that people accept messages more easily if they're included in entertainment.

Over the past eight years, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Bangkok has refined a 12-Step Methodology for developing and creating these types of materials. With support from the Asian Development Bank and UNAIDS, UNESCO has produced 13 culturally and linguistically appropriate radio shows in Cambodia, China, Lao PDR and Thailand on issues surrounding HIV and AIDS, drug abuse and trafficking/unsafe migration.

External reviews by the Asian Development Bank concluded that the HIV and AIDS knowledge of local people who listened to the shows created in their own language radically increased. For example, the reviewers found that in Ratankiri, Cambodia, before listening to the Brao language radio show, only 35% of Brao villagers knew that unprotected sex was a risk factor for HIV. This number increased to 74% after listening to the show.

"To share UNESCO’s experience and proven methodology it has written a manual on how to produce linguistically and culturally appropriate minority language media, especially radio dramas," said Heather Peters, senior consultant at the culture unit of UNESCO Bangkok.

Gathering lessons learned from over 10 years of UNESCO experience in producing prevention dramas in local languages, "Reaching the Unreached: A Practical Guide to Produce HIV and AIDS Prevention Audio-Visual Materials in Ethnic Minority Languages" is now available in English, Chinese, Thai, Lao and Vietnamese.

The manual is designed for people who want to develop materials in ethnic languages but are not sure how; for example, local communication and health officials, NGO workers and people from other organizations. Explaining and giving examples of why culture and language are essential in HIV prevention, the manual offers a simple but detailed explanation of the 12-Step UNESCO Methodology. It also outlines practical steps needed to design and produce a prevention drama in ethnic languages.

"The message of the manual is that people everywhere respond best to information which is provided in their own language in a culturally appropriate context," said David Feingold, coordinator for HIV/AIDS and Trafficking Projects, Culture Unit, UNESCO Bangkok. Although this manual focuses on HIV and AIDS, drug abuse and trafficking/unsafe migration prevention radio dramas, the UNESCO methodology can and should be applied to a wide range of other issues such as maternal and child health, immunization, agriculture and even tourism.

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