



SUCCESS STORY

SHAPING HIV PREVENTION ATTITUDES OF AND THROUGH THE MEDIA



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Today more than ever, technology is developing faster than we ever imagined. Smart phones seem to be taking the place of face-to-face interactions and the internet is drawing the world closer. This may have led many to wonder about the relevance of radio and other media outlets, but Daniel's story makes us know that "Radio (still) gets results" and must not be overlooked as a way of bringing help to the people we seek to reach with our work.

Just ask Daniel, 32, a taxi driver in Lomé, Togo, who listens to the radio most of his working day. He recently had a change of heart about HIV prevention and vulnerable populations, thanks to health programs on local Kanal Radio. "They were eye-openers for me," he said of the programs. "They helped me to realize the importance of HIV prevention for everyone. I also learned about vulnerable persons like female sex workers and men having sex with men. I do not judge them anymore and I agree that we should respect their human rights as persons and their right to health services as any other citizen."

The influential programs featured Kanal Radio's Sweetie Lawson, one of the journalists who had attended training workshops to raise awareness among media owners, editors and reporters about the discrimination and violence experienced daily by key populations.

The workshops—sponsored by the USAID-funded Regional HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care Project (PACTE-VIH)—were the result of alliances formed between the media, HIV responders and members of vulnerable communities.

They addressed a lack of information, objectivity, and rigor among journalists needed to effectively analyze issues related to HIV prevention and vulnerable populations. Reporters had difficulty accessing credible sources and lacked resources to conduct investigations on the topic because editors were reluctant to back them. In addition to providing valuable information, the workshops offered a first-person glimpse into the health challenges and insecurity, suffering and violation of human rights vulnerable populations face every day.

Ms. Lawson found the workshops to be quite valuable. "They helped to improve my sensitivity and the accuracy of my reporting on radio. I think this kind of training should be encouraged," she said, adding that it has changed the way she reports on the topic. "It is important for that we provide health services to MSMs in order to reduce HIV infection in our country."

Another important product of the workshops was the creation of regular Media Forums ("Forums des Acteurs Médiatiques") that enable participants to stay at the forefront of knowledge on HIV prevention. Senior media personnel meet in these forums every three months in Togo and every six

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months in Burkina Faso.

The forums not only encourage information sharing, but also foster adherence to principles of professional ethics among media leaders in covering stories about vulnerable populations. In Togo, forum participants developed a Charter for Media Professionals, comprising 10 principles to improve reporting on HIV prevention and comprehensive care of vulnerable populations. In Burkina Faso, participants created a five-point Declaration of Principles for Media Organizations. These documents are displayed prominently in newsrooms and represent a commitment to ensure the utility of information and its truthfulness, balance and diversity. The media's professional codes of ethics also mandate these principles.

PACTE-VIH (2012–2017) supports government efforts in Togo, Burkina Faso and other West African countries to improve HIV prevention strategies and reduce stigma and violence against vulnerable persons. The project conducts targeted and versatile interventions that can be adapted and replicated across the West African region