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SBCC Material and Activity Formats for Audiences with Lower Literacy Skills

Effective social and behavior change communication (SBCC) materials and activities aim to be informative and engaging by mobilizing intended audiences through interactive formats. While engagement is important for all audiences, it is especially so for audiences with lower literacy skills. Having opportunities to interact with new information or content can help these audiences understand, remember, and interpret content within their own thinking, context, and experiences. These issues are explored in this *C-Bulletin*.

What Channels and Formats are Interactive?

While interpersonal, community, and mass and social media channels have the potential to be interactive, some channels and formats lend themselves to audience participation more than others. Storytelling and songs, radio and TV talk shows, role play and drama, games and game shows, and risk- and body-mapping have been described to be the most action-oriented formats. They are most useful when they help audiences to engage in dialogue or practice skills or behaviors. They can be used across channels. Drama, for example, can work well face-to-face and on radio and TV.

Including these, other examples of interactive SBCC materials and activities are listed below:

INTERPERSONAL CHANNELS

- Face-to-face dialogue guides for meetings or counseling sessions
- Flip charts, picture codes, talk boards, and other job aids for health providers, along with objects, e.g., penis models that demonstrate condom use
- Training job aids that use role plays and check lists
- Brochures with quizzes, fill-in-the-gap sections, and scratch-offs
- Comic book scripts or photo novellas (booklets using photos to tell stories)
- Online chat rooms

COMMUNITY CHANNELS

- Stop-and-go drama scripts
- Risk-mapping and body-mapping tools
- Storytelling and songs
- Board, card, and group games

MASS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- Posters with questions or graphics that invite inquiry or immediate action using social media
- Website blogs that request responses
- TV or radio talk shows with live audience interaction, through call-ins, letters, emails, and text messages
- Serial dramas that ask audiences to email, call, or text to suggest different endings
- Game shows that invite audience call-ins, emails, and text messages

Why Use Different Types of Interactive Formats?

Learning is an active process. People make sense of new information within their own contexts, and how they understand it is greatly influenced by their past experiences. Materials and activities that are engaging and action-oriented help people to think critically and to solve problems, coming up with solutions that might work well for them. This is even more important for lower literacy audiences because it is harder for them to learn from written materials alone.

An interactive format allows these audiences to form connections and engage with the topic by acting out a situation or talking about it, rather than just passively watching or listening. This allows audience members to incorporate problem-solving and dialogue in ways they are more likely to remember and repeat.

The following describes the types and advantages of interactive formats that are used and provides the SBCC practitioner with cautionary notes.

STORYTELLING AND SONGS

Oral storytelling and songs do not require a high literacy level and are often easily understood by listeners. In many cultures, these formats are cherished and play an important role in oral histories. Stories and songs can be an ideal format for SBCC materials and activities, not only within interpersonal and community channels, but also in print, radio, TV, and social media channels.

Stories and songs have been proven to be an effective format for health and development communication efforts. In Uganda, for example, the use of storytelling and songs by traditional birth attendants and mothers is said to have contributed to reductions in maternal and child deaths.

One drawback is that stories and songs continually change when passed from person-to-person. SBCC practitioners thus face challenges in controlling their content, and careful planning and monitoring is needed. Some of the advantages of using storytelling and songs for audiences with lower literacy skills are listed below:

- Stories and songs grab attention and encourage learning. They support interaction and the development of social and personal belief systems and attitudes. These are important factors for change.
- Audiences understand abstract concepts communicated through stories and

songs better than when communicated in writing. Concepts are more concrete when presented in a story or song because it places the idea or ideas in a context.

- A story or song that is relevant to the local culture (and, ideally, is generated from it) allows audiences to learn new information more easily.
- Characters in a story supply concrete examples, for example, of cultural practices and accepted behaviors. Audiences can analyze and draw their own conclusions about the narrative, the characters, and the setting.

RADIO AND TV TALK SHOWS

Broadcast media—radio and TV—are channels that appropriately serve the needs of lower literacy audiences, with radio having more reach and influence than television or newspapers in many countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Radio and TV broadcasts of entertainment-education talk shows, which allow for interactivity, help listeners and viewers understand technical information. Talk shows can also be used to influence political decision-making and advocacy, support community health workers, encourage discussion, and provide reliable information around health and other topics. For this to happen, SBCC practitioners need to ensure talk shows are well designed and topics well scripted, relevant to the context of the intended audiences, and in the languages they use. In addition, a call-in component, if used properly, can allow for correction of misinformation, e.g., trained hosts or knowledgeable guests answer questions.

One note of caution: Because radio and TV are used by many health programs there is strong competition for air time. If planned programming is not scheduled with enough repetition at appropriate times and with advance promotion, key themes and action-oriented messages may be lost among the myriad of other health program broadcasts.

ROLE PLAYS AND DRAMA

Role plays and drama, if realistic to the audience, can contribute to improved understanding and learning and create space for conversation and dialogue. Through these formats, audiences do not need to be able to read or write to understand and participate because they receive important visual cues, something radio alone cannot do. Role plays mirror people's understanding of a certain issue and generate discussion; hence they are often part of exploratory workshop and group facilitation where content is generally left up to audiences to develop. Role plays can be enhanced by using adjunct activities, e.g., finger puppets, such as those provided in the C-Change Community Conversation Toolkit (for HIV Prevention).

Drama relies on professionally scripted formats with well-thought-out, focused, and tested primary and secondary storylines. Storylines need to be believable, even if not true and audiences must identify with the characters. Drama storylines can prompt audiences to reflect on their own lives and how they would act in the same situation. In addition, they may be influenced by characters in the drama that model the desired change and show how conflicts and issues can be resolved. Through the actions and words of these characters, audiences may come to see how they also could make this change.

Drama can also prompt discussion. This is particularly true of stop-and-go drama and trigger videos (short videos triggering discussion), which pause at different points and ask the audience to consider the consequences of a character's actions or how the story should

continue. Interactive discussions after a drama presentation can increase audience members' level of engagement in a topic and their understanding of it. Finally, people who are engaged by a drama help to disseminate information when they repeat the storyline and describe the characters. Guides can be developed to accompany role plays and drama to highlight and clarify key concepts.



Students participate in a DramAidE forum theater performance at a high school in KwaZulu-Natal (© 2000 Patrick Coleman, Courtesy of Photoshare)

SBCC practitioners should note that successful dramas require focused scripts, and no distracting secondary storylines.

GAMES AND GAME SHOWS

Games are universally loved and have been played since the dawn of civilization. Card games, board games, quiz competitions, puzzles, Bingo, and online games are among the types that can be used by SBCC practitioners with lower literacy audiences of all ages to promote change and learning. Games are excellent vehicles for maximizing experiential learning (or learning through experience). Games encourage participants to discover things on their own—an important principle of adult learning—and are a proven way to attract and hold attention. They can assist people with learning disabilities because they create adjustable and variable ways of conveying information and ideas and accommodate individual learning styles. Games also allow for experimentation without negative consequences. Research indicates that socially based learning can have a significant positive effect on retention.

Group games require input and active participation from everyone. They are often motivating, especially if they involve competition to reach a goal. Games get people to relax, but can also challenge them to embrace the subject matter. Playing a game generates an upbeat mood and keeps energy levels high throughout a “lesson.” Games suit diverse learners and are often free of charge or inexpensive. The only limits to games are time and imagination.

Games can also tap into higher-order and lower-order thinking skills that range from retaining and recalling information to critical thinking—or the ability to recall, comprehend, apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate subject matter.

Online gaming has started to become an important source for interactivity in SBCC. Digital gaming includes downloadable computer games, games on social media (such as Facebook), mobile games, mobile applications, and a lot more.

The Good Life Show, an educational and interactive game show on radio and TV in Uganda, had couples play against each other and tested their knowledge about a weekly health topic. Through a telephone hotline, callers answered health questions and commented on the show. Community-based road shows and mobile screenings provided more opportunities for audiences to interact and learn in small groups.

Interactive Formats for Audiences with Lower Literacy Skills

Interactive formats	Characteristics
Storytelling and songs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cherished by many cultures; grab attention and encourage learning, including understanding of abstract concepts and concrete examples (though these can change when passed from person to person)
Radio and TV talk shows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have more reach and influence than other formats, though NGOs compete for air time and audience participation is limited to SMS, call-ins, letter writing, or outreach
Role plays and dramas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage greater levels of audience participation, conversation, and dialogue than the other two formats; can model behaviors and solutions
Games and game shows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universally loved; motivating; require active participation and input from everyone; tap into lower-order and higher-order thinking skills
Risk and body mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify places, events, and risk behaviors in communities and requires group discussions and reflection

RISK AND BODY MAPPING

Mapping is used in participatory action research to help key community stakeholders and audience members mutually identify community resources, main places, events, and risk behaviors taking place in different localities and who is taking part in them. Together, stakeholders and audience members use a big piece of paper to draw out a physical map and mark it with different symbols and colors.

Body mapping is another popular interactive methodology. Developed by HIV practitioners that use art for healing, it involves skilled facilitators who create a safe space for participants to draw life-sized pictures of themselves and convey their thoughts about living with HIV or other chronic diseases and the stigma they face.

Body mapping requires individual reflection and group discussions, but not a high literacy level. Pictures from body mapping workshops have been successfully used in meeting and public spaces for educational purposes and have informed communication materials developed for HIV prevention and treatment.



Map created by an HIV-positive woman in Kenya who had not disclosed to anyone. Body mapping gave her a chance “to reveal everything” and to feel empowered. (Art2Be)

How Are Written Materials Made More Interactive?

Having written text that is interactive allows audiences that have difficulty reading to stay engaged and focused. Here are several ways to make written text more interactive.

Dialogues and quotes: Dialogues and quotes within a text can help illustrate a point, such as how audiences can overcome barriers to a specific action. They can also be used to provide additional information.

Questions and answers: Q&A formats can be effective because they allow the reader to immediately find answers to their questions. It is important to phrase the question that directly relates to the reader's interests and then provides the answer clearly.

True or false questions: True or false formats allow readers to get involved by responding to questions. This works well to clarify common misconceptions.

Fill-in the blanks: This format involves users by making them think and apply the learning from other parts of the material.

Short stories: Short stories can be an effective way to illustrate the result of a recommended action. Stories can be personalized so that readers can relate to and see themselves in the characters. Remember to keep stories brief so that readers stay interested.

Proverbs: Proverbs exist in many cultures and may be particularly appropriate for older audiences. They can draw people in and serve as a catalyst for discussion.

How Should the Interactive Format be Selected?

There is no one-size-fits-all format for SBCC materials and activities. As with any audience, a strategic mix of media and channels is needed to reach people with lower literacy skills and reinforce content and messages.

Consider the following when making decisions about the format of SBCC materials and activities:

Audience needs: The format selected should reflect how the audience likes to receive information, whether they are used to interacting with materials and activities, and how much time they have available for interactive activities. If they do not have the time or interest in stop-and-go theater performances or a trigger video, the material or activity will not work, no matter how creative it is.

Distribution methods: The material or activity needs to fit the overall dissemination plan, match available resources, and be compatible with the infrastructure in communities that need to be reached. Many interactive activities are not possible if skilled community organizers do not lead them or if specific kinds of equipment (such as flannel boards and DVD players) are not available.

Available budget and time: Budget and time requirements will limit the number of formats that can be created. More formats may be added through collaboration with other programs.

Training and a wider program structure: Interactive material and activity formats should be introduced by experienced facilitators and supported by a wider program structure that incorporates a combination of media and channels. Training is key to ensuring quality. For example, theater groups need training on scriptwriting and technical content of dramas and role plays; health extension workers need to be oriented on how to use interactive toolkits and lead dialogue sessions.

Module 2 of C-Change's *C-Modules* provides more information on channel selection (http://www.c-changeprogram.org/sites/default/files/sbcc_module2.pdf).

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BARRIERS TO INTERACTIVITY?

Many reasons exist for why some SBCC practitioners avoid embracing interactive formats to improve materials and interventions. Each of these reasons/barriers can be successfully addressed with some research and thoughtful planning.

- Communication is viewed as unidirectional, i.e., seeing the need to persuade audiences rather than allow them to interact with their opinions. SBCC practitioners may only view themselves as teachers of content.
- Discomfort and anxiety with new or innovative materials and interventions. This can be further reinforced by a lack of knowledge, skills, equipment, or resources.
- Limited incentives and support for developing more interactive materials, developing and testing materials, and in preparation time.
- Perception that interactivity involves risks, risks that the audience will not participate or that they will not learn and that facilitators will feel a loss of control, lack of skills, or be criticized for using unorthodox ways.

What Is the Value Added?

Interactive SBCC interventions engage audiences, especially those with lower literacy skills. Interactivity encourages them to learn and think about the content of the materials or activities within their own contexts and to develop individual and local solutions that last.

Have These Standards Been Met When Selecting the Format for SBCC Materials and Activities?

- Explored a variety of interactive formats that respond to the needs of audiences with lower literacy skills
- Selected formats that reflect proven audience preferences and the time they might want to spend learning about the information and messages in the materials or activities
- Chosen formats that can be produced within available budget and time constraints
- Decided on formats that are compatible with the rest of the intervention strategy and identified needs

CommunicationBulletins

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- 9 CONDUCTING A STAKEHOLDER REVIEW
- 10 ADAPTING MATERIALS FOR AUDIENCES WITH LOWER LITERACY SKILLS

Feel free to make copies.
We welcome the sharing
of resources.



Resources for More Information

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