



Concept Note

Client: Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs

Brand: N/A

Product: 26 Episode Television Series (15 SEASONS)

BACKGROUND

Population, Health and Nutrition Issues in Zambia

Zambia grapples with several major public health concerns that are obstacles to ensuring an improved quality of life for Zambia's population.

The high disease burden in Zambia is compounded by the high prevalence of HIV, high poverty levels and the poor macroeconomic situation. With 14% of the adult population infected with HIV, Zambia remains one of the hardest hit countries (ZDHS 2007) in Sub-Saharan Africa and the World. There are many social and economic factors that can be indicative of why the rates are so high, including the practice of multiple concurrent partnership and high prevalence of hazardous drink patterns such as drinking large quantities of alcohol per session and being frequently intoxicated, that increase an individual risk of contracting HIV.

Malaria continues to remain a major public health problem in Zambia. In 2007 (ZDHS), 4.3 million cases of malaria were reported, and 6,149 deaths country-wide. The annual malaria incidence was estimated at 358 cases per 1000 population. Malaria control is a priority, the disease accounts for 40 percent of all infant mortality and 20% of all maternal mortality in Zambia. Malaria poses a severe social and economic burden on communities living in endemic areas.

Children are one of the most affected groups when it comes to the high disease burden. Almost two-thirds of childhood deaths in Zambia occur during infancy, with more than one quarter taking place during the first month of life. 45% of children under five are stunted and 21% are severely stunted. 5% of children under five are wasted and 15% of children are underweight. Many children in Zambia receive poor nutrition which affects both physical and mental development.

Unplanned pregnancies are also common in Zambia. Overall 16% of births are unwanted, while 26 percent are mistimed. Teenage Pregnancy is high in Zambia. About three in ten young women aged between 15-19 have begun child-bearing, that is that they have given birth already or are currently pregnant with their first child. 27% of currently married women have an unmet need for family planning, 17 percent for spacing and 9% for limiting. There are high reported incidences of domestic violence and sexual violence with 47% of women reporting that they have experienced some form of physical violence.

Although many positive results have been reported, there are still gaps to promote positive health seeking behaviour which could result in a positive improvement in the key areas highlighted.

THE IDEA

A twenty-six episode series focussing on promoting positive health-seeking behaviour among the general population. The proposed series package will include a 45-minute per episode series with the initial season being 26 episodes and subsequent seasons being 13 episodes each. Packaged with the series are Public Service Announcements (PSA) on various health issues.

Each episode or series of episodes) will highlight a health concern e.g malaria and focus on the behaviour change objective required to prevent that particular health problem.

The series is targeted at the general public (young people, men and women, policy makers, professionals and opinion leaders). The intention of this series is to make the audience aware of various issues surrounding health and wellness by showing how an individual, family and the community are impacted by various and specific health issues and the contributing and/or surrounding dynamics that affect them.

THE STORY

The story depicts the lives of five families whose stories through either background or 'chance' meetings are interconnected. They are bonded by common challenges and ambitions for a better life for themselves and their families. Each family is either headed by both parents but in some cases single parents and parents have known each other since secondary school; some of them having remained in constant touch since then and some only rekindling their relationship as the series unfolds.

Although it will be seen as an ensemble drama, the series will revolve around Elisha*, newspaper columnist, married with two teenage children who will provides the focal point for the group. Through Elisha each one of the other families is connected. Regarded by his family and friends as 'the go to person', to get sensible and unbiased advise, Elisha plays the narrator of life's ups and down as they exist in Zambian society. His wife is a doctor at a government hospital/clinic and his son and daughter are in the late and mid teens respectively. Through Elisha's work and his weekly column - an investigative report on the 'real issues' that affect the community we hold a mirror to Zambian society, engaging the audience as they closely examine the lives that we lead and the future that we mould for ourselves. Elisha's commentary, often a reflection of his own life and his interactions with his group of friends and family, sums up each episode, with each episode dealing with a health or social issue that he is reporting for his column. Each episode is a 'week in the life' of Elisha and the other main characters in the series. The 'conclusion' to the episode appears through the narration of part of his weekly column and the beginning and end of the show.

As much as Elisha has perspective on life and through his wife we are able to get the grasp of many health issues, his life is far from perfect as he deals with deep seeded marital and family problems; a rebel son whose world view is at opposing opposites with his father's and a daughter who is in the prime of her life and has dreams she imagines are bigger than those that her parents can comprehend.

Elisha's social and family network consist of his best friend from secondary school days, who is now a successful lawyer, married to an accountant wife and father of four. His life would appear on the surface to be everything that he wished for but as with most in the series he has many challenges.

During the course of the first season Elisha comes into contact with their long lost friend, Philemoni, a once promising student whose life took a turn for the worse and found himself economically and socially challenged. While he does not have a wife or steady girlfriend, Philemoni enjoys a string of relationships and one-night stands often formed in the comfort of his most frequented place – The Tavern where he drinks away his hard earned money. Philemoni's story is sad while inspiring the audience to root for him as we see his efforts to make good and improve his life against all odds. While he has never been married we discover that Philemoni has a child.

Through Elisha's wife, the Doctor we are introduced to the life in the hospital/clinic and in the community. One of her closest confidants is a nurse at the hospital; a widow with three children of her own (all girls of various ages) while her [Elisha's wife] younger sister is two years younger THAN her is her true best friend. She is married to a successful husband who spends more time cheating on her than anything else and they have three children together.

Each one of the characters: family, friends, children bring a story that unfolds over the course of the series against the backdrop of the stories Elisha covers on his quest for truth and the betterment of his fellow man. Through their stories; the newspaper reports, the families, the friends, the hospital and the community we deal with various health and related issues, and explore different social economic groups and the different health challenges that they face.

VISUAL REALIZATION/TREATMENT

The series will be shot in High Definition digital video format with particular attention being paid to lighting, sound, camera work and editing to create a quality product that will appeal to the audience through both content and quality. The production will aim to be as real as possible in a similar fashion to series such as HBO's 'The Wire', in which the production reflects real life so well that it resonates with the audience and acts as a mirror, providing insight into many of the needs and challenges that provide the thread to the social fabric of life in Zambia

BROADCAST & DISTRIBUTION

It is proposed that the series be broadcast on ZNBC, and MUVI TV, as well as Africa Magic Plus (a popular channel on Multichoice's DSTV platform) at prime once a week. Each season will also be packaged for DVD, to be used for rental in video stores as well as for use in other settings such as workplace programs, school and university outreach programs (for this use the DVD will be packaged in a kit containing a discussion guide and other relevant handouts).