

Literacy, Gender and HIV/AIDS Series

Breaking the silence

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Literacy and Non-Formal Education Section

Division of Basic Education

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**Product of a UNESCO workshop for the preparation
of Gender-sensitive booklets on HIV/AIDS**

**Adapted from a booklet produced at the UNESCO
Workshop for the Preparation of Gender-sensitive Materials**

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is one of an ever-growing series of easy-to-read materials produced at a succession of UNESCO workshops.

The workshops are based on the appreciation that gender-sensitive literacy materials are powerful tools for communicating messages on HIV/AIDS to poor rural people, particularly illiterate women and out-of-school girls.

Based on the belief that HIV/AIDS is simultaneously a health and a social, cultural and economic issue, the workshops train a wide range of stakeholders in HIV/AIDS prevention including literacy, health and other development workers, HIV/AIDS specialists, law enforcement officers, material developers and media professionals.

Before a workshop begins, the participants select their target communities and carry out needs assessments of their potential readers.

At the workshops, participants go through exercises helping them to fine-tune their sensitivity to gender issues and to how these affect people's risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. The analysis of these assessments at the workshops serves as the basis for identifying the priority issues to be addressed in the booklets.

They are also exposed to principles of writing for people with limited reading skills.

Each writer then works on his or her booklet with support from the group.

The booklets address a wide-range of issues normally not included in materials for HIV/AIDS such as the secondary status of girls and women in the family, the "sugar daddy" phenomenon, wife inheritance, the hyena practice¹, traditional medicinal practices, superstitions, home-based care and living positively with AIDS.

They have one thing in common — they influence greatly a person's safety from contracting HIV/AIDS.

We hope that these booklets will inspire readers to reflect on the problems and issues that ordinary women and men face in their day-to-day relationships.

In so doing, they might reach a conclusion that the responsibility is theirs to save their own lives and those of their loved ones from HIV/AIDS.

¹ The hyena practice is the custom of exposing young virgins to sex with an unidentified man as part of their initiation rites

It was about midnight when Hafeni arrived home in Ondangwa. He had spent six months working in a factory in Outjo.

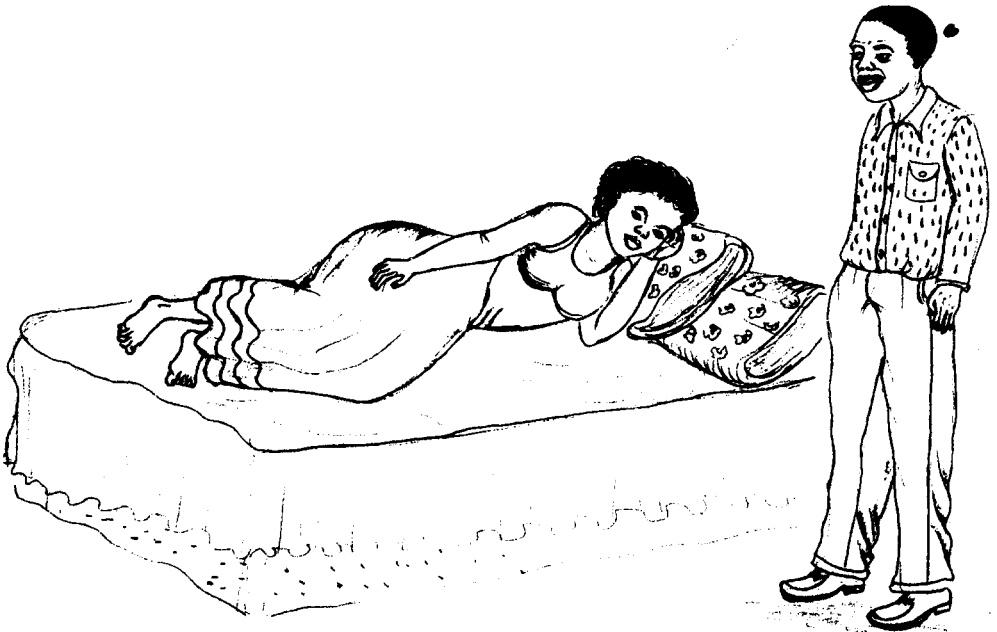
How nice to see you back home! Ipawa is asleep now. He'll be happy to see his father tomorrow morning.

Ndinelao, I'm so happy to be back home and be with my family again.



In their room, Hafeni kept thinking about his HIV status and about his family.

Ndinelao is a lovely woman. I love my boy. He is my pride. Thank God for giving me this beautiful family. Stupid me! I am going to mess up this good life. I've been acting like a fool. God, if I am honest with Ndinelao, she'll kill me. My life will be destroyed. But if I don't tell her, I could make her sick. And what will happen to my baby, then?



Looking at Ndinelao, Hafeni became very excited. He realized that he had missed her so much during all these months. They made love. They felt very close to each other. But Hafeni didn't forget to use a condom.



The next morning, Ndinelao kept thinking of the night before.

What did Hafeni do? It felt very different. But, I can't ask him. He'll think I love other men. He'll think I'm a whore!



I wish I could tell her so that we could go open. I feel like a liar. I've been a bad father and a horrible husband. Oh, God! Why did I have to run around with those girls in Outjo?

I was very lonely there. Living away from Ndinela and my son was hell. I was just trying to make money to support my family. Life was so hard. I needed to spend time with girls just to survive.



Hefani thought hard about how he spent his time in Outjo. Thousands of men are in the same situation. They are caught between their family responsibility and loneliness

The next Monday...at 2:30pm

We are from the Thakamos Counselling Services. You know, it's dangerous to sleep around. A lot of people still have girlfriends or boyfriends. How could we know which one is infected? A person can be safe from AIDS if he uses condoms. Using condoms give a different feeling during sex. Most people get used to it.

I heard that people could be sick and still look fat and healthy.



Aah... I see. Could it be that Hafeni was using a condom? But how come? Is he sick?

During dinner, Ndinelao told her husband about the visitors they had received during the day.

Today, the Thakamos group came to visit us. They were talking about HIV/AIDS. They say people should use condoms to protect themselves.

Oh, yes..er. I know. But what did they say about the condoms?



They said infected people must use condoms. They can get them free at the clinic.

Has she guessed that I used a condom all these days?

One month passed, Hafeni enjoyed being with his family so much. He realized how much he missed his son. He also felt that his son needs him.

He is such a gorgeous son. How long will I live to see him grow? I'll visit the Thakamos group to ask them what to do.

All right, my boy. Pull hard. Yes, just like that. You're a strong little boy. Yeah!



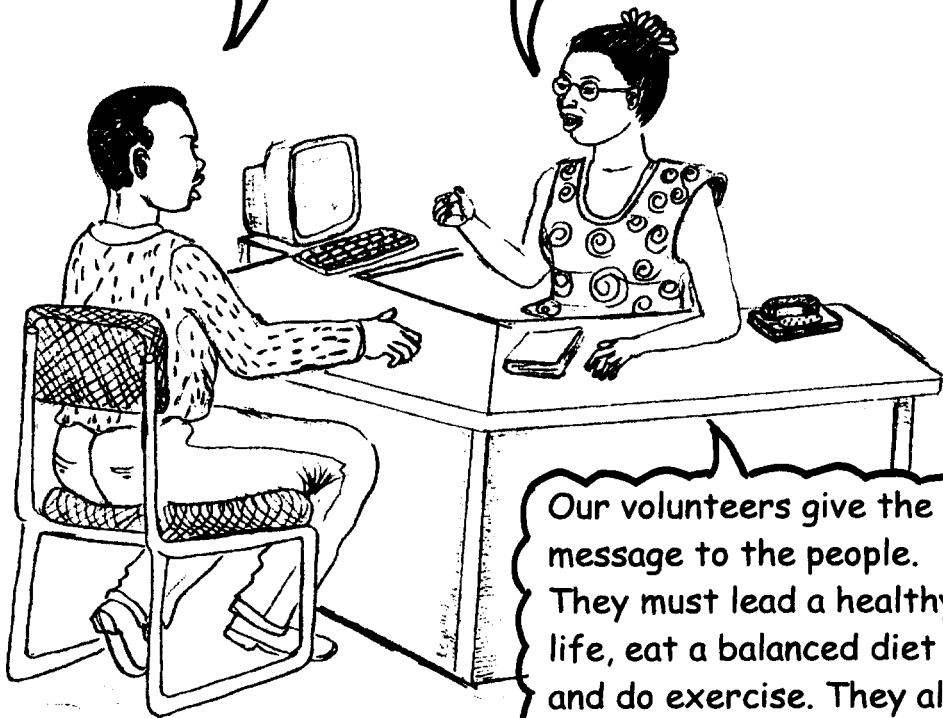
Eh dad! More, more. Let's do this again. It's fun! I love it, when you're home with us.



The next day, Hafeni visited the Thakamos Office. He was well received and felt at ease.

I have come to learn about your services. I would like some help from you.

We work in the communities. We tell people about HIV/AIDS. We also advise the infected people how to take care of themselves, and how to lead a positive life.

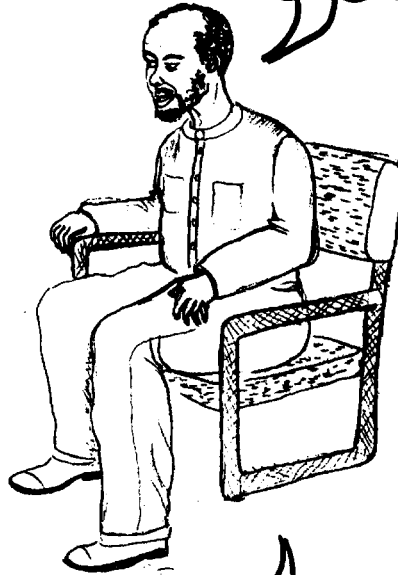


Our volunteers give the message to the people. They must lead a healthy life, eat a balanced diet and do exercise. They also need to have enough sleep.

Hafeni finally went to see the Pastor.

Pastor Lyambo, I need your help. I have a big problem. I can't tell my wife the truth. When I went to work in Outjo, I got a lady to live with me. Today I'm not strong enough to tell my wife. I request you to tell her.

I understand my son. It's not easy to face the consequence of some of our actions. Did you sleep with your wife when you came back from Outjo?



Yes, Pastor. But I used condoms. She doesn't know it. And I'm afraid that one day she will. I love my wife and my son so much, Pastor. What should I do?

Come and see me with Ndinelao. You've been a very good couple. And you're a very good man.

A few days later, Hafeni and Ndinelao were visiting the Pastor.

Pastor Lyambo, good to see you again. I have come with Ndinelao. It's about the story I told you on Monday.

Ndinelao, I know you're a child of God. Show your faith in God. Your husband loves you. You may have known. Your husband went away to Outjo. He felt lonely and got himself a woman. She is HIV positive. Your husband makes sure that he doesn't infect you. He used condoms for the past four months. So you're safe. Now my child, I'm going to ask you to accept this. You'll be safe. Hafeni will protect you. He will always use condoms.



Oh my God! What did we do to deserve this? We are cursed! Hafeni, why did you have to do that? Don't you think of your son?

For three whole months, Hafeni and Ndinelao went for counselling. Little by little Ndinelao learned to accept Hafeni's HIV status. But it was not easy for either of them.

Ndinelao, please, forgive me for bringing this curse into our house. You're a good woman. I don't deserve you. Oh, God, why? Why? Why could I not be more careful?

My husband, Hafeni don't cry. This is our faith. Father Lyambo said that you have to live well and be strong. Then you can live for a long time. Ten years, even more. Don't worry about me. I'm strong. I'll be at your side.



It's easy to ask questions in hindsight. Maybe we'll all learn from Hafeni and ask the question before it's too late.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1) What do you think about Hafeni's behaviour at Outjo?**
- 2) What should he have done or not?**
- 3) Is it easy for Hafeni to tell his wife about his HIV status? How do you know?**
- 4) Did Hafeni use condoms with his wife? What do you think?**
- 5) What do you think about Ndinelao's reaction after making love with her husband? Does she talk to him openly? Why?**
- 6) Where did Hafeni go for help?**
- 7) What was the Pastor's reaction?**
- 8) What is Ndinelao's reaction when she comes to know her husband's HIV status? What do you think?**
- 9) In your opinion, what are the rules of life that HIV people should follow up in order to live as long as possible?**
- 10) How does AIDS spread?**
- 11) Where can you informations about HIV/AIDS?**

Written by Africans for Africans, this booklet is one of a growing series prepared during UNESCO training workshops to produce gender-sensitive materials for HIV/AIDS prevention for southern African countries.

When gender concerns are integrated into post-literacy materials which recognize local conditions, peoples' attitudes, values and beliefs, dreams and aspirations, they provide a powerful tool for tackling the HIV/AIDS pandemic currently ravaging southern Africa.

The series is an effort at filling the void left by medically oriented and didactic materials. They are based on the assumption that effective materials can help people change their attitudes, which in turn, will bring about positive changes in their behaviour.

These booklets reflect the way people communicate in southern Africa in the 21st century – their images, customs, attitudes and beliefs. They are aimed at helping readers – women and men, young and old – to raise issues and seek answers to questions concerning their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.