THERE FOR DEVELOPMENT: A MULTIFORM APPROACH TO
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST
SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS IN DEFENCE FORCES.

By

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Introduction:
Zambia is a land locked country 750,000 sq Km in area and a population of 10 million. The annual population growth is 3.1%. The population is generally youthful with 54% aged 15 years and below. Life expectancy is estimated at 40 years. This is reduction from around 57 years in the 1990s.

Politically, Zambia is a multiparty system. There are 30 political parties and only two: the Multiparty Democracy Party and United Party for National Development dominate seats in a parliament of 150 members. There is noticeable high degree of political tolerance.

Culturally, the country is varied. It is predominantly a country of Bantu people who speak 73 languages. Six of the languages are classified as national and used for education in the early part of basic education. English, a colonial language, is the official language for administration and education. There are minority ethnic groups that include Zambian of Asian and European origin.

ECONOMY: the country is naturally well endowed but poor partly due to many years devoted to supporting liberation wars in the surrounding

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countries and mismanagement of resources. There is now greater focus on ridding the country of corruption from management of public affairs.

The economy is mineral-based and copper is the main export earner that contributes over 60% to GDP. In 2003, GDP per capita was $360 and GDP annual growth rate was estimated at 4.1%. The level of poverty is high estimated at 75% for the whole country and at over 80% in rural areas. All efforts are directed at reducing the level of poverty to less than 50% by the year 2015. The country’s indebtedness is estimated at US$7 billion (Republic of Zambia, 2003)

**HIV/AIDS:** the prevalence rate of HIV/ AIDS was 19.7% in 2003 in the age group 15 to 39 years. It was estimated at 34% for urban and at 13% for rural areas. There is noticeable drop in prevalence of positive tests in 15 – 19year olds (Republic of Zambia, 2003). Defence personnel in the three units (army, Air Force and National Service), teachers, nurses and minibus drivers are perceived to be among the most infected working groups. The most vulnerable social groups are commercial sexual workers and street children.

**SHORT BACKGROUND:** HIV/AIDS prevention in the armed forces falls under the Director General of Defence Medical Services headed by a brigadier general. The directorate coordinates health matters in the defence units. Each unit has a director answerable to the Director General. HIV/aids is under the Director General. An officer of the rank Lieutenant Colonel is in charge of HIV/AIDS prevention. For reasons that are occupational, social and economic the defence personnel are a vulnerable group to HIV/AIDs infection.

Prevention, organized by UNESCO Bangkok Office, the Regional Bureau for Education and the University of Chiangmai from 1-5th March, 2004.
Information on prevalence and mortality rates due to aids-related diseases in the defence units is not in the public domain and no major study has been carried out to determine the extent of the problem. What is clear is the frequency of deaths that characterizes all defence units and has necessitated regular advertisements for recruitment of new entrants to the defence units.

**Theatre for Development**: was introduced in the three units of the defence forces (Air Force, Army and National Service) six months ago. The focus is on behaviour change. The project engaged services of a consultant and began with training for 35 animateurs consisting of airmen (7), soldiers (9) and 14 non-military workers (mainly widows) employed to provide home-based care. About half of the participants were involved in some cultural work as singers and performers.

The content of training embraced aspects participatory research using participatory learning approach (PLA) techniques, facilitation of group events and performance skills (choirs, dance, drama).

The research comprised learning about methodology and conduct of fieldwork to investigate knowledge, attitudes and practices of defence personnel from highest to lowest ranks. First, animateurs carried out in-group research using PLA tools and later carried out fieldwork among senior and junior officers as well as their families within randomly chosen bases and camps of the three units.

The artistic skills, comprised coding issues into three art forms (drama, songs, dance), touring the performance to selected camps and bases and embarking on tours of the whole country.
The drama coded four themes: the plight of the widows in bases and camps, drunkenness due to lack of meaningful occupation in the bases and camps, risky sex behaviour at operation areas, long absences from the homes due to prolonged military operations.

Performances were carried out in three stages. The first performance was for senior officers of the three units at which they provided feed back on accuracy of content of songs and the drama. The second performance was for combined ranks in selected camps and bases to further validate the content of songs and the drama before finalizing the performances. The third series of performances involved countrywide tours of military bases and camps.

At the end of each performance, audiences were divided into small discussion groups made up of 10-15 people to decode the content of the performances and report back in a plenary session. Each session ended with reactions from the most senior officers attending the performances.

During the first part of the project, animateurs reached over close to 3,000 defence personnel and their families in 11 camps and bases. The group took a break and it will soon continue touring other bases and camps.

**Funding:** The Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program and GEO-CENTERS of American Army provided a grant of $100,000 with the objectives of 1) improving HIV/AIDS skills of uniformed services personnel, 2) strengthening HIV/AIDS/ STI behaviour change communication efforts targeted at uniformed service personnel 3) strengthening diagnostic management of STIs at military clinics and 4) increasing the quality and utilization of voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) services. The funding was sourced by the Project Concern International (PCI) an American non governmental organization that has
become a major partner of not only Zambian defence forces but other armies in Southern Africa, in their fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

**Target group:** the project targeted defence personnel of all ranks and their families. Thus during tours some performances were differentiated according to the ranks. Where the population was small, officers and non-commissioned personnel attended same performances but held discussions in different groups.

**Linkages:** Theatre for Development also variously called Theatre for Community Animation, Popular Theatre, and Theatre for Integrated Rural Development is part of a social movement covering many parts of Africa. It was given greater visibility in the late 1970s and 1980s and has grown differently in other parts of the developing world. It has been used to support development work covering health, water and agriculture (Abah, 1997). In recent times, TFD has been extended to HIV/AIDS prevention for community mobilization, information dissemination and is used widely in Uganda through the work of The Aids Support Organization (TASO) in Uganda, in South Africa through work of many groups employing dance, puppetry and dialogue drama; and in Tanzania it has been used for promoting girls’ education (Mwansa and Bergman, 2003).

In Zambia, TFD is a major tool for investigating and disseminating information and organizing people in matters of development and has in the last fours years been part of the campaign against the spread of HIV/AIDS. It is located in government ministries, the work of many NGOs and over 400 theatre groups participate on either full time or part time basis.

Varieties of approaches used in TFD include theatre for, by and with the people. In theatre for the people, animateurs control the process and
present a finished product to targeted or undifferentiated audience (Abah, 1997). In theatre with people, outsiders collaboratively work with selected groups of people from the target group; in theatre by the people local people assume control of the process.

Of the three approaches, theatre with the people and theatre by the people yield greater results than theatre for the people in that theatre for the people does not locate ownership into the target group and tends to be hit and run (Kidd, 2002).

**CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT**: Paulo Freirian theory of conscientization whose central focus is empowerment of marginalized groups informs Theatre for Development. Freire posited that the poor are poor because they have no voice and have absorbed a culture of silence. This culture of silence is reinforced by banking education in which learners are treated as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. Freire argued that the marginalized could gain back the lost voice through dialogue and what he called problem posing education in which the roles of the educators and educatees are exchangeable (Freire, 1978)

HIV/AIDS disempowers the affected or infected. Disempowerment takes many forms that include isolation, discrimination in jobs and relationships, inability to be in control of one’s own life. Disempowerment induces a sense of hopelessness.

In the defence units, disempowerment manifested itself in reported cases of suicide due to fear of being exposed among all ranks, large numbers of widows who could not fend for themselves and resorted to sex work within the camps and bases.

There were over seven cases reported of officers of the rank of captain up to colonel and warrant officers who committed suicide in the event of being discovered with HIV. Stigma is strongly attached to HIV/AIDS and
engulfs the entire social fabric in Zambia. A recent survey found that the major social and health challenges facing Zambia relative to HIV/AIDS are stigma, attitudes and misconceptions (Zambia, 2003:24).

Power begins when one gains the confidence and ability to analyse own social, and economic situation, articulate challenges, propose possible action for prevention of spread of HIV/AIDS, declare one’s own status and create communion with others in making some change.

In HIV Aids prevention, empowerment is considered to be taking place when there is community mobilization coupled with action research carried out by identified target group (Beecker et al 1998; Wellerstein et al 1994). Further, empowerment requires recognition of structural barriers and making efforts to change such barriers (Kebaabetswe et al 2002:517).

The efficacy of Theatre for Development in development work in general has been confirmed through various micro projects that have employed it in Africa (Abah, 1997; Eyoh, 1997; Kerr,1995; Mlamah, 1991; Malamah -Thomas1989) and other parts of the developing world (Epskamp 1989; Mwansa, 1990). Mda (1993) concluded that Theatre for Development is effective in mobilization, conscientization, creation of two way processes, promoting decision making, creation of inter-group and inter-settlement solidarity as well as revitalization of people’s own forms of cultural expression.

**Major concrete activities undertaken:** the major activities undertaken were training in and conduct of research into the causes of HIV/AIDS, production and taking on tour of a one hour drama that involved animateurs, adaptation of the drama to video and production of CD and audio cassettes.

First, the training was carried out over a period of three weeks during which time participants leant about the theory of TFD, the different techniques for
gaining entrée, collecting and analyze data. The research process was concretized through initial collection of data within the group and triangulated in the bases and camps through interviews with officers of all ranks and their families. Research in itself was a learning experience among the animateurs and defence personnel. The process stimulated broadly-based discussions on HIV/AIDS in selected bases where animateurs conducted research.

Creation of dramas and songs was preceded by learning about the differences among theatre for pure entertainment and theatre with educational purpose and adaptation from one artistic form to another. The drama and songs encapsulated key issues that were common among all the units thus making the drama and songs become whole defence force productions. The gravity of HIV/AIDS and the authenticity of messages rallied audiences behind their performers.

In each camp or base where the drama was staged, audiences first identified themselves with the military colours of their units and with the messages that the performances carried.

Second, the group transformed the drama into a video Watch out Soldier, 53 minutes in duration of which 300 copies have been produced for distribution to all bases and camps.

Third, all the songs used in the drama production were commercially recorded and packaged into 2,500 audiocassettes and 100 CD cassettes for distribution to all bases and camps and for integration in AIDS education programme.

Fourth, 6,000 tracks and posters carrying HIV/AIDS messages were distributed. The last activity to be undertaken is training of 70 other animateurs with plans to locate a drama group in each base and camp.
**Effects**: the drama and songs touched the hearts and minds of defence personnel and led to noticeable changes in interactions and reactions in several ways.

First, though defence etiquette is founded on deference to seniority and based hierarchical structure, the lower ranking officers who carried out research interacted with their seniors more closely because of common experiences that the interviews elicited.

At the research stage, two senior officers at the rank of colonel disclosed their status and one openly confessed the life soldiers led in operation areas. He vividly explained behavioral consequences of the motto of three Ws (women, wine and war) that impelled service men and women to engage in unrestrained sexual activities with women and men they met in operation areas.

During performances watched by all ranks but arranged according to positions, audiences reacted to message content with rekindled passions spurned by memories of common lifestyles in operation areas and the camps. The drama elicited concentrated attention only punctuated by laughter in those parts designed to ease tension.

Second, the performances opened up discussions on military life styles in residences and in operation areas. Discussions became animated over what should be done. They made suggestions, which became part of the reports submitted to the military high command.

The major leading the animateurs on countrywide tours reported his impression of the effect of TFD as follows:
Third, the performances stirred up an attitudinal change that began removing stigma from infection with HIV/AIDS. Animateurs known to have HIV infection began to reveal their own status and at various performances other defence personnel began to disclose their status in whispers and small sounds.

Fourth, the performances contributed to quickened implementation of concrete interventions that were on the drawing board of the high military command such as distribution of ARVs. More concretely, the state through the Ministry of Defence laid out funds to match donor funding to support continuation of TFD tours to other parts of the country.

Fifth, the project brought some extra income to and raised the status of animateurs. They ceased to be simple or ordinary soldiers and airmen but were perceived to have become community educators and catalysts for social change.

Sixth, given the potentially liberating environment, created by discussion of HIV/AIDS in the public, it is anticipated that there will be increased self-disclosure and attendance of voluntary testing and counseling among defence personnel of all ranks.

**Main capacities built include:** The project built capacity for junior defence personnel in three area: research, artistic skills, groups dynamics

  **Research.** The concept of research was demystified. The service men and women began to collect information in a systematic way and used the information to create cultural works, which appealed to their own constituencies. They learnt the semantics of research in its simplified by pertinent way. They used PLA techniques for data collection, which included use of time lines to map out history of the units vis as vis HIV/AIDS, venn diagrams to identify institutions rendering support and key to the fight against HIV/AIDS and matrices to identify knowledge, attitudes and life styles.
Through use of timelines, animateurs found that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in each unit coincided with large group events. After each group event, the number of service men and women affected or infected increased. The group events included:

1) Sporting activities – that brought together different defence units and civilian organizations.

2) Transportation of goods to and from ports e.g large numbers of drivers died shortly after transporting new vehicles from Daresalaam –

3) Military Operations – Both local and UN. Appreciable numbers of defence personnel died after returning from operations.

4) Training events such as – the rotated training for brass bands in places located near civilian settlements. In 1998, 77 members of the Zambia Air Force Brass Band died after their training in L/stone.

Animateurs used venn diagrams to identify key institutions that were engaged in aids prevention. Though they were aware of institutions in their own units, they began to have a holistic picture of institutions that were involved in aids prevention in the defence units. They discovered that three defence units proactively tackled the problem of HIV/AIDS and worked more with their inside institutions and less with outside organizations but were all related to the Director General’s office which co-ordinated counselor training, provision of ARVs and sensitization programmes. They also identified other common institutions.

The second institution common to all three units was the Kafue Remedy Centre – It is a mini- hospital that offers treatment through nutrition and use of natural remedies. The Centre has won recognition as International Centre in the use of natural remedies for treatment of HIV/AIDS.

The third institution is the Home Based Care – that involves many widows in provision of care to ailing troops and their families.
The fourth institution is the Women Club variously called Mfuti Club for the army, for ZAF and for Zambia National Service.

The last institution was the Chaplaincy which provides spiritual and emotional support to the bereaved.

Other institutions outside military establishments were the University Teaching Hospital for testing and is specific to ZNS; the Family Health Trust – responsible for provision of condoms; Project Concern International working in sensitization and supporting counselor training.

The fairly large number of institutions working with the defence units in demonstrated the concern that the Ministry of Defence had attached to the challenge paused by HIV/AIDS in the armed forces.

Animateurs created composite matrices and venn diagrams to come up with a bigger picture of commonalities and differences particularly on causes of HIV/AIDS.

Through use of, matrices animateurs discovered social, economic and occupational causes of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in their midst.

Social Causes: Included confinement to institutional homes. Most service men and women are housed in overcrowded homes where they use communal conveniences and bath rooms thus increasing the chances of women and men exchanging their partners.

Second, there are too many dependants of service men and women some of whom attracted to barracks and bases for purposes of looking for marriage partners.
Third, lack of recreational facilities was blamed for dormancy and was linked to drunkenness after working hours.

Occupational Causes: ranked highest and included prolonged period of military operations both UN and local. Service men went away on operations for periods ranging between six months and one year during which time they establish relationships with local men and women. While in operations they also exchanged partners.

The Second occupational problem was restriction imposed on servicemen and women not to marry until they have attained a higher rank or served more than five years.

Using the game of Pro and Contra and question prompts, animateur probed personal attitudes and knowledge they had on HIV/AIDS. They exhibited a combination of positive and negative attitudes. For example, while only a small number felt that infected people should be isolated, majority felt that HIV/AIDS was God’s punishment to sinful people. The latter attitude was indication of the general feeling of despondency that engulfs the society. On knowledge, participants seemed to have a great amount of knowledge about causes and the ways to prevent the spread. The national survey on knowledge people had about HIV/AIDS rated 98%. (Republic of Zambia, 2003)

**Artistic Skills**: animateurs learnt how to link the different artistic forms. Drama, music and dance were interlinked in content and sequence that complemented each other. The musicians created songs that warned the defence personnel against continuing with the life styles they led. Most songs touched the souls and hearts. Director General of the Defence Medical Services predicated the likely impact when he wrote:
As you listen to the lyrics, the message is definitely going to have a positive impact on your lifestyle and that of your family and friends. Theatre artists turned the hard facts of life into three discrete dramas which they pieced together to create one drama that in a sympathetic way paused the question as to whether that was how they should live or they should change and save their lives.

The drama depicted the temptations that widows without income faced, the drunken lives that men and women in uniform led, the unrestrained exchange of same partners at operations areas, its effect and possible solutions to the problem.

They all learnt new skills of how to act in a video as they spent long hours working on the scenes and perfecting their movements. Above all they learnt how to work with each other in a complementary way.

**Group dynamic skills**: animateurs learnt group dynamic skills of how to conduct discussion groups and report back to plenary sessions. Animateurs began to see themselves as facilitators of group events and not as performers of on one-off activity. On the tours they passed on similar skills to others. For example, when they performed before 800 soldiers ready for deployment on the UN military operations, they passed on responsibility to others to become the chairpersons and secretaries to report back the answers.

**MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS**

**EFFECTS**: the main causes of the persistence and spread of HIV/AIDS are social, economical and efforts aimed at prevention should tackle these areas of human existence.
TDF touches both the emotional and intellectual aspects of human life because it combines research and education through entertainment that spurs audiences to reassess their own lives and take action.

Military personnel have made greater strides towards targeted people. Through the use of TFD the animateurs mirrored back to the military personnel the known life styles. The immediate reactions of the audiences were of the self-assessment and suggestions for change of styles in the bases and camps of the three units.

The other reaction was of confession and surprise. Service men and women made public admission that when they were out on operations they engaged in risky sexual behaviours that involved sleeping with multiple partners, exchanging partners, being given partners as sign of recognizing seniority. Partners who remained in the cantonments also confessed that they involved themselves in same conduct.

Women confessed that men in barracks had no regard for the partners of their colleagues and as soon as one group was deployed in operations, those who remained started making advances at the remaining men and women. Both service men and women and their families expressed surprise that they were engaged in similar risky sex behaviours.

As others have indicated (Ajzen et al 1980), behaviour change is also indicated by intension to behave in a certain way. This change is also conditional upon self-evaluation and social norms (evaluation of expectation from others).

An Officer of the rank of major accompanying the group, filed a report to the Director General Medical Defence services in which he said:

The strategy of drama has immediate impact on social behaviour of individuals. One is able to relate what he hears and observes in the play to
him or herself. This approach of community awareness about HIV/AIDS should not wear down and all units should be reached (Banda, 2003)

In the post-performance period, many activities have been undertaken to combat spread of HIV/AIDS. Though planned earlier, their implementation has been accelerated and intensified. For example, coinciding with the start of the project the army deployed an officer to be in charge of home-based care. The new officer, who also participated in the project, pressed for increased supply of ARVs and food supplements, referred cases to the centre for natural remedies, gave counsel to defence personnel at various group events. The training for AIDS counselors in the defense units increased.

**OBSTACLES:** The obstacles are mainly resource related. First, initially, the perception of TFD as an activity peripheral to the core business of the three units made it difficult to attract many people to attend. The first three performances were not well attended because they clashed with other activities and only partners of servicemen attended. Additionally, animatuers who were a combination of uniformed women and men and civilians first saw TFD as extra responsibility for which they must be financially rewarded. This attitude increased the cost because all animateurs had to be paid allowances at every meeting and they did not see TFD as an integral part of their daily work.

Second, due to the high costs, the activity did not reach far-flung military operation areas, which have been affected by the behaviors of defence personnel. Anecdotal evidence from the areas surrounding military operations indicates that those areas are replete with children born of soldiers.

Third, the project was catalyzed with external financial support and has continued to depend largely on external donations. TFD is labour intensive and requires resources, time messianic commitment. It requires mainstreaming so that it can benefit from state budgetary allocations.
Fourth, fatigue arising from long journeys made performers change content and structure of the drama hence putting up hurriedly done performances.

Fifth, due to lack of resources, monitoring and evaluation are not systematically and integrated into the project. With the process under way, there is need for intensified monitoring and evaluation in order to systematically assess the impact,

Sixth, the economic plight of the widows has not been addressed. They continue to stay in bases and camps without assured income while waiting for payment of the dues of their departed husbands. Without attending to the economic challenges facing the widows, the combat against the spread of HIV/AIDS will not achieve much result.

**MAJOR SHIFT:** The project has had to make adjustments necessitated by the increasing cost of doing the work. Mobile theatre requires investment into reliable transport, subsistence allowances, food and longing and allocation of adequate time.

The major shift is towards the use of a video and recorded music. Following production of the one-hour video it is planned that the video will be able to reach a wider audience and can be part of intensified social marketing strategy through the national TV network which has in recent times been extended to rural areas.

The second shift is toward training of additional 70 animatuers who will cover other regions of the country. This stage will involve the already trained warrant officers to become trainers of others.

The last shift is towards creation of small theatre groups located in each military camps and air force bases which can be used for dynamising the service men
and women. Examples in Tanzania indicate that formation of locally based groups can create more everlasting impact.

**Lessons:** TFD has grown in its own and needs to be mainstreamed to support other interventions that are being undertaken particularly those aimed at preventing further spread of HIV/AIDS.

TFD cannot cure those already infected but it can help remove stigma from infection and create an atmosphere in which the infected and affected can begin to feel free to associate with others. If located among and utilized by the people affected, TFD can give people a voice and hope of living a bit longer.

Second, because TFD exposes attitudes and practices, it can act as a deterrent on those who may want to involve themselves in risky behaviours. When what existed in the private domain becomes open or public knowledge the chances of the behaviour change are increased.

Third, if TDF is linked to mass media using video, television and radio it can reach more people. That the activities of defence personnel in operation areas impact on lives of civilians in surrounding areas, the dissemination and education campaigns should reach civilian groups in operation areas.

Due to increased cost of carrying out TFD, the work of TFD should be decentralized to regions, camps and bases for it to have more enduring effect and reduced costs.
References


