

# **A Slow Awakening**

**The media and HIV/AIDS epidemic  
in Nigeria: A Scorecard**

**Produced by  
Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) Nigeria**

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Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) Nigeria is a media-based non-governmental, not-for-profit organization, with a mission to contribute to the prevention, care and control of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria by providing innovative communication interventions that will facilitate positive behaviour change to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigate its impact.

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## **Acronyms and abbreviations**

**DFID:** British Department for International Development

**SACA:** State Action Committee on HIV/AIDS

**JAAIDS:** Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) Nigeria

**HIV:** Human Immuno Deficiency Virus

**AIDS:** Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome

**PLWHA:** People Living With HIV/AIDS

**NUJ:** Nigeria Union of Journalists

**NAWOJ:** Nigerian Association of Women Journalists

**LGA:** Local Government Area

**ARV:** Anti-retroviral therapy

## **Preface**

The media is widely acknowledged as a platform for change: usually behavioural change, but also importantly, *policy* change. In terms of the HIV/AIDS pandemic especially, the media stands as a critical agent inducing positive behavioural and attitudinal change that can stem the tide of the epidemic. This should be particularly true for Nigeria, which is among the top five most affected countries in the world.

Available evidence suggests that Nigeria is at the threshold of an HIV/AIDS explosion. With an estimated HIV-positive population of 3.5 million, we are second only to South Africa in terms of the sheer number of people infected. Over the past decade, national HIV prevalence has risen steadily to the present figure of 5.8%, from 1.8% in 1991, 3.8% in 1993, 4.5% in 1995, 5.4% in 1999 and 5.8% in 2001. And the number keeps increasing; everyday, 1440 Nigerians become infected.

The media must join other segments of society in inducing the positive behavioural change that can stop the epidemic. One way to do this is by stopping the rampant cases of sensationalism, inappropriate and stigmatizing language, judgmental reports and numerous inaccuracies that are witnessed in press coverage of HIV/AIDS.

In the past decade, some efforts had been made by different stakeholder groups to redress this situation. These efforts have ranged from training targeted at different levels of media professionals, to direct efforts aimed at the media workplace. While such efforts have achieved some success, it is clear that a lot more needs to be done to fill these identified gaps.

In March 2002, Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) Nigeria commenced a project to monitor coverage of HIV/AIDS in the print media in Nigeria over 13 months, with support of the USAID-funded POLICY Project. This involved analysis of HIV/AIDS reports in eleven nationally-circulating daily newspapers and nine weekly magazines.

The project aimed to determine the quality and quantity of information on HIV/AIDS available in the media; establish trends and focus of coverage; determine gaps in HIV/AIDS coverage; and provide a baseline to measure impact of interventions to enhance HIV/AIDS reporting skills among journalists and identify training needs.

Specifically, the exercise aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What is the extent and adequacy of the knowledge of Nigerian journalists on HIV/AIDS?
- What is the quantity and quality of information on HIV/AIDS in the Nigeria media?

- What is the focus of HIV/AIDS coverage available in the media? What are the gaps in coverage?
- What has been the impact of media reporting on the public attitude to HIV/AIDS?

It is our hope that this study will be useful to media gatekeepers across the land, publishers and health reporters, media librarians, journalism trainers and other professionals involved in HIV/AIDS communication. We hope that it will become a valuable source of data for future interventions with the media on HIV/AIDS, not only in Nigeria, but also across Africa and beyond.

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July 2003

## **MEDIA REPORTING OF HIV/AIDS IN NIGERIA**

For the many stakeholders involved in the important campaign to bring HIV/AIDS out of the closet and strip the condition of its mystery and dread, the performance and contributions of the media to the effort have been a longstanding source of concern.

However, the journalist essentially mirrors the society, warts and all, and this truism may explain why the media professionals have been usually lukewarm partners in the battle against a condition and disease which threaten to pauperize our continent and return us to the Stone Age.

As matters stand, although there are heartwarming pin-pricks of light in the gloom, the Nigerian society is still largely secretive about HIV/AIDS. The attitude is “if you have it don’t tell me and don’t come near me.”

People react with fear and hatred to those who disclose that they are HIV-positive and most shockingly, they are rejected even by loved ones, relatives, friends and clergymen.

In roughly the same manner, sensational and stigmatizing HIV/AIDS reportage by the Press is due to ignorance, fear and the journalist’s love for the wild story - the wilder, the better. A blend of these factors ensured that for several years, media professionals put HIV and AIDS in the bizarre and out-of-this-world category –things which don’t happen to “normal” or decent people.

Hard-bitten reporters loved to crack crude and earthy jokes about the disease in the newsroom and many reporters genuinely believed that AIDS was a white man’s disease which no African need worry his head about. Even when news filtered in about the worrisome inroads of the disease in Uganda, Zimbabwe and Zambia, most media professionals hardly gave the matter a second thought.

Fortunately however, the situation has changed somewhat and there is significant improvement in the knowledge and attitude of the journalists. This is not a tectonic shift, but it is change nonetheless.

What helped the situation was the global village phenomenon by which a deluge of up-to-the-minute information and data from the northern hemisphere daily flood into African cities. There was also the unremitting pressure from the Western countries and multilateral institutions for Africa to wake up from her torpor and confront the AIDS epidemic before it is too late. The discovery of the cocktail of drugs and later the anti-retrovirals also helped to ease the paralyzing fear which HIV-AIDS had induced in Africans.

Currently, the Nigerian journalist’s social and professional limitations are the biggest obstacles to excellent HIV/AIDS reportage in the country. Some of these

limitations are job insecurity, low pay, negative peer pressure, poor working tools, lack of training and the media's penchant for frothy, sensational reports.

Socially, the journalists are afraid to offend or confront powerful governmental, religious or community leaders, who are usually conservative, if not downright backward. There is also the stifling dominance of politics and moneybags in the society. Without doubt, these are tough challenges.

This survey, **A Slow Awakening**, is a picture in a freeze-frame of the character and performance of the national print media in terms of HIV/AIDS reportage for 13 months. While aspects of the performance are disappointing and discouraging, other parts nonetheless induce hope that the media will do better in future.

The raw materials for the survey were 11 English language dailies and 9 newsmagazines and soft-sell publications, including a Yoruba language weekly. It was a good selection. Although the dailies mostly reach upper and middle class citizens in the cities, the soft-sells reach a much wider spread of society and their inclusion was appropriate.

This summary gives an accurate picture of the performance of the national print media in Nigeria in terms of HIV/AIDS reportage for 13 months. It's a mixed grill of good, bad and indifferent.

Monthly reports from March 2002 to March 2003 showed significant variations from month to month. For instance, the highest figure of 212 reports in July 2003 is more than double the lowest tally of 84 reports in March 2003. There were also up and down swings in totals from month to month.

It was only in the first six months of monitoring that the survey showed a steady increase in HIV/AIDS reports published in the newspapers and magazines, going from 102 in March to 209 in August 2002. There are the monthly totals for the six months: March (102); April (109); May (115); June (156); July (216); and August (209).

There was a sharp drop in September 2002, when 136 reports were monitored and the development was mainly due to the resting of National Interest and the Anchor newspapers.

Over the 13 – months monitoring, the Post Express published the highest number of relevant reports (240), followed by the Comet (226), Daily Times (204). The Guardian (193), Daily Champion (191), This Day (187), Punch (181), Vanguard (180), Nigerian Tribune (152), The Anchor (38) and National Interest (22). All added up to 1814 reports.

Concerning coverage categories the monitored publications published 1374 news reports (74.5 percent); 304 newsfeatures (18.1 percent); 126 opinion articles (6.8 percent) and 10 editorials (0.5 percent).

The newspapers also published 375 photographs, as well as 71 cartoons over the 13 – months periods.

Newspapers in the country now publish more reports and articles on HIV/AIDS. This is very commendable as it indicates a commitment to raise awareness about the presence and spread of the virus and draw attention to the plight of people living with HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, now estimated at 3.5 million.

One major concern though is the very low number of editorials written on the combined campaign against the spread of the virus. While *The Guardian* published two editorials, *Vanguard* and *Tribune* also published one each. Since editorials are the opinions of the newspapers, it would be helpful if newspapers once in a while, write editorials on some aspects of the campaign.

Just as there has been an increase in the **quantity** of HIV/AIDS reports published, there has also been considerable improvement in the **quality** of such reports. Based on the use of appropriate HIV/AIDS language and terminologies and relevance of the stories to the campaign, 49 reports were rated **good**, 1407 **Fair** , 353 **Poor** and 5 **very poor**. The monitoring also revealed that we have moved from the era when HIV/AIDS was a mere health issue to a matter affecting other areas like business, labour, religion, agriculture, defence and education.

Apart from regular news stories, the monitoring recorded publication of incisive feature reports, which support the public enlightenment drive against HIV/AIDS. However, the use of inappropriate and stigmatising language and terminologies like 'scourge', 'plague' and 'victim' remains a recurring factor in many reports, especially those written by non-health correspondents. Such terms seem to be preferred for headlines and riders in many reports monitored.

Unconsciously, some reports helped sustain unfounded myths about the virus. This happens when some uninformed opinions are given undue attention. Cases of sensationalism noticed in the monitoring discredit the good work being done by newspapers and should be discouraged. There was also lack of follow-up of reports. Sources and focus of reports were also factors considered in the monitoring. 1692 reports were original items generated by writers, while 122 were either culled from foreign magazines or sourced from news agencies.

The ratio of culled materials to original ones is good enough. However, it was noticed that some of the culled stories were probably used to fill the pages. There is the need to introduce local backgrounding in some of the reports, as some of the culled reports had exclusively foreign content.

On the focus of coverage by the newspapers, the analysis of reports indicates that more stories and reports expectedly focused on **Awareness/Prevention** issues (975reports, 57.6%). This is not unexpected as there have been increased

campaigns to alert the public on the virus and prevent its spread Advocacy had 393 reports.

**Treatment and Care** (399reports) also got good attention, while **Cure claims, Policy pronouncements, Litigation** and **Statistics** featured less. The papers did not have many stories on cure claims especially by alternative medical practitioners, compared to the trend in 2001.

Generally, the survey indicates that the media has not done badly. There is however still room to improve quality of reports. This will however depend on the support the media can get from stakeholders involved in the campaign. Negative slants are also still common, with cover stories obviously sensationalized for commercial reasons. On the whole, 1407 reports(84.8%) were classified as **fair** while 353 were rated **poor**.

The findings from January to March 2003 followed the same pattern delineated above, albeit with nine newspapers monitored instead of eleven, due to suspension of publication by two newspapers.

The total monthly reports from March 2002 to March 2003 show wide variations from month to month. For example, the highest figure of 212 reports in July 2002 is more than twice the lowest total of 84 reports in March 2003. This is a huge gap. There are also up and down swings in totals from month to month.

What this means is that the attention of the editors wander from month to month as far as coverage of HIV/AIDS issues are concerned, and as a result, there was no consistency in volume of reportage.

Space allocation in the publications basically mirrors the monthly totals of published reports. The highest figures are 39½ pages for July 2002; 31 pages for August 2002; 30 pages for February 2003; and 27 pages for November 2002 and January 2003. The lowest figures – which are strangely low – are 9 pages for April 2002 and 8 pages for May the same year.

As far as coverage categories are concerned, there is a substantial gap between hard news and the other categories, as the figures below will show: 1374 news reports (74.5 percent); 304 newsfeatures (18.1 percent); 126 opinion articles (6.8 percent); and 10 editorials (0.5 percent).

What can be said here is that since straight news reports are usually consumed in a hurry, they may have less impact on the readers than other categories. Cartoons especially have tremendous potential for generating comments and hopefully inducing behavioural change. The survey recorded only 71 cartoons. Although 375 photographs were recorded under the survey, the figure is misleading because a significant proportion of the pictures would be those of government officials, which normally have little impact on readers.

There are eight sub-headings under the survey's focus of coverage, with varying figures for each. 975 reports (57.6 percent) were recorded for Awareness / Prevention; 393 reports (23.2 percent) for Advocacy / Campaign; 399 reports (16.2 percent) for Treatment / Care; 17 reports (1.0 percent) for Litigation; 10 reports (0.5 percent) each for Cure Claims and Policy Pronouncements; 8 reports (0.4 percent) for Statistics and only 2 reports for Research.

It is appropriate that Awareness / Prevention and Advocacy / Campaign received the bulk of media coverage since they are most critical at this early stage of the struggle to change the mind-set of the citizens. However, whenever societal awareness reaches a satisfactory level, it would be necessary to give Treatment / Care greater push.

Concerning the quality of press coverage, the survey categorized reports into good (49 reports – 2.9 percent); fair (1407 reports – 84.8 percent); poor (353 reports – 11.9 percent); and very poor (5 reports – 0.3 percent). Given the complexion and disposition of the national media, the 84.8 percent reports classified as fair seem on the high side.

When it comes to originality of reports, the ratio is 1811 original reports to 125 reports culled from the wire agencies. But the actual number of original reports may be lower than this since a significant proportion of the originals were derived from press statements and bulletins issued by NGOs.

The newspapers ranking designates the *Post Express* as the most supportive medium with 240 reports. The others in descending order are *The Comet* (226 reports); *Daily Times* (204 reports); *The Guardian* (193 reports); and *Daily Champion* (191 reports). *National Interest* published the least number of 22 over a few months. It is noticeable that the gaps between the totals of the top-ranked newspapers are not large, which probably means that they received uniform and non-discriminatory attention from the anti-HIV/AIDS campaigners. Such an even-handed strategy should be sustained.

On balance, the print media has performed well and responded reasonably adequately to the urgings of HIV/AIDS advocacy groups to sensitize the citizenry as to the true nature of the HIV condition and the disease, so as to reduce scare-mongering and allow dispassionate discourse on the subject.

However, the biggest weakness of the present strategy is that while it generates an impressive volume of hard news, the ultimate impact of the reports may be quite low. The first limitation, as indicated above, is that readers tend to skim news reports or perhaps read only the lead paragraphs. Secondly, they may not identify with the subjects of the copy. Thirdly, many people in our society simply loathe reading news reports.

Conversely, newsfeatures, especially those written by staff reporters after diligent investigation, are far more likely to be read, and readers may even identify with

the subjects of such reports. As such, the campaign needs many more newsfeatures.

The second issue, which is related to the first, is that reports on awareness, prevention, advocacy and other sub-headings, need to be moved away from the health pages into other pages and departments of the publications, especially those pages which attract youths and women. Doing this will give the materials better readership.

Non-governmental organisations should not tire of organising training for various groups in the media. The campaign to check the impact of HIV/AIDS is one that must be won to save humanity. No effort must be spared to get an important segment of society like the media appreciate the need for its total commitment to this crusade.

## **GRAPHICS**

## Research Design

A total of 20 daily and weekly publications were monitored during the 13-month study, which ran from March 2002 to March 2003. The newspaper and magazine selection reflected national spread and included all the major nationally-circulating publications available on the newsstands during the period. Regional and state-level publications were however excluded, and should be a focus of interest for future surveys.

In the magazine category, care was taken to include both news and soft-sell (human interest) titles, as well as a local language title popular in the Lagos area. Of the 20 publications monitored, only one (*Daily Times*) is public-owned, reflecting the current trend in ownership of national (print) media outlets in Nigeria. The impact, if any, that media ownership may have played in coverage of HIV/AIDS was, however, not a focus of this research, and may be a pointer for future studies.

The daily newspapers included in the study were:

1. *The Comet*
2. *National Interest*
3. *Daily Champion*
4. *Daily Times*
5. *The Post Express*
6. *The Anchor*
7. *Nigerian Tribune*
8. *Vanguard*
9. *The Punch*
10. *This Day*
11. *The Guardian*
12. *Daily Independent*

The weekly magazines were:

1. *Insider Weekly*
2. *TELL*
3. *The News*
4. *New Treasure*
5. *Newswatch*
6. *FAME*
7. *National Encomium*
8. *Global Excellence*
9. *Alaroye* (published in Yoruba language).

In undertaking the survey, codes were developed for classification of published items in terms of type (news, feature, opinion, editorial etc), story focus (treatment, policy, prevention etc), illustration (cartoons, pictures etc), prominence of use, page, space allocated etc. See table below:

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Date</b>	Date of the publication monitored
<b>No of Reports</b>	Refers to the number of reports or briefs on HIV/AIDS in a particular edition of the publication
<b>Type</b>	Refers to whether the report is news, interview, features, editorial or opinion article
<b>Page</b>	Page on which the story is published
<b>Picture/ Cartoon</b>	Refers to the appropriateness, quality and use of cartoons and pictures in illustrating the stories.
<b>Missed or Unreported reports</b>	Refers to events expected to get good media mention (e.g. a major HIV/AIDS event) but not published by the publication being monitored
<b>Headline</b>	Addresses the appropriateness of the headline used; whether the headline accurately reflects the report or bows to sensationalism
<b>Focus</b>	Refers to the issues addressed in the story. For example, whether the report focuses on policy pronouncements, statistics, coverage of an event, 'cure' claim, access to treatment etc
<b>Quality</b>	Use of appropriate language, balance, accuracy, relevance to local situation, and focus on people living with HIV/AIDS
<b>Prominence</b>	Whether front page report or published on the back page or health page etc. Also, amount of space allowed the report; this would be measured in columns, as well as number of paragraphs
<b>Source</b>	Whether the story was originated by the writer or culled from another publication, news agency or a press statement.

In determining the quality of reports published, each was classified into one of three categories: 'good quality', 'fair quality' and 'low quality', based on six criteria: accuracy, relevance, balance, depth, appropriate use of language and focus on the human angle. The criteria are explained in detail below:

**1. Appropriate use of language:** Terms like 'AIDS victims', 'killer disease', 'AIDS scourge', innocent victims' etc are regarded as insensitive or inappropriate in HIV/AIDS communication, because they describe in subjective, judgemental and inaccurate terms. The study examined stories for evidence of sensitivity in terms of using non-stigmatising language, non-portrayal of HIV/AIDS as an 'us and them' issue etc.

**2. Focus on the human angle:** Any good article on HIV/AIDS must bring into the subject matter its impact on people living with it (PLWHA) or people affected by the epidemic. In other words, treatment of stories should not be in abstraction, or report merely for reporting sake. HIV/AIDS is about people. Thus, the researchers examined articles for treatment that portrayed the human angle, or that focused on human lives or gives readers a better understanding as to the impact of the disease.

**3. Relevance:** Oftentimes, media gatekeepers publish stories that are lifted

straight from international news agencies (VOA, Reuters, AFP, CNN, AP, BBC etc) without adapting to the local situation. Do the reports betray this weakness, do they relate foreign incidents to local context? Are the interviewees or quotes reflecting local sources?

**4. Depth:** How investigative are the articles? Are the stories based on press statements or are they comprehensively-researched? Is the story based on an event or does it link events to long-term issues? Do the stories merely report statistics or do they go the extra mile to explain the source of the figures and demonstrate their credibility? Does the writer background the story, and report the 'real issues' or is it another "according to..." story?

**5. Balance:** The question asked here is whether there is any imbalance in the treatment of the event or person in focus. Is the writer fair to the subject of discourse?

**6. Accuracy:** In addition to content analysis, the research team also conducted **key informant interviews** with reporters, (especially those on health beat), to assist in understanding their disposition, interest, knowledge or lack thereof in coverage of HIV/AIDS. In the case of missed stories, the researchers held follow-up interviews with relevant reporters and editors to understand peculiar circumstances that may account for non-coverage of such stories. The interviews assisted in determining training needs of journalists and problems hindering effective coverage of HIV/AIDS.

## **Monthly Media Reports**

## **CARTER AND GATES IN NIGERIA (MARCH 2002)**

In a month when former American President, Jimmy Carter and Bill Gates (snr), father of Microsoft magnate, Bill Gates, visited Nigeria on an awareness-raising tour, it would have been a surprise if HIV/AIDS issues did not receive prime attention by the print media.

The principle of personalities making news came to play in the cover treatment given to HIV/AIDS in the media during the duo's visit to the country, early in the month of March. During the visit, coverage of HIV/AIDS issues moved momentarily from inside pages, where they are usually consigned, to the front pages.

Reports on the visit made the front pages of three newspapers. Three photographs relating to the visit also appeared in the press, two on cover pages and one on a back page. However, coverage of the visit could still be considered poor. For instance, one of the highlights of the visit was a presidential forum on HIV/AIDS attended by President Olusegun Obasanjo, governors of some of Nigeria's 36 states and other top political leaders. Surprisingly, that particular event received scant treatment in the print media. Coverage was limited to brief, two-paragraph mentions in one or two newspapers without any details supplied of the issues discussed at the forum. It would appear that organisers of the presidential forum did not engage the media for coverage of the event.

Eleven nationally-circulated daily newspapers were monitored in March. In all, the newspapers published 101 stories during the month. These included 66 news stories, 24 feature articles, 10 opinion articles and interviews and one editorial.

While the total number of reports published suggests that every paper had at least one news item per day during the month, the reality however is that coverage was concentrated on particular days. Most of the publications appeared on the health pages of the newspapers. *Post Express* and *National Interest*, both publish a four-page weekly health pullout, two of the pages are regularly devoted to HIV/AIDS.

If what is published on health pages is anything to go by, HIV/AIDS definitely had more news coverage than other health issues. In the *National Interest* of March 7 for instance, out of the four pages on health, up to two pages had HIV/AIDS-related stories. *The Guardian's* science and health page of March 14 also reflected the trend in favour of HIV/AIDS, with two out of five stories published on the page focusing on the epidemic.

It was noticed that most of items published as feature-length articles were not originated by reporters, but usually a rehash of news items earlier published and

stories culled from news agencies or foreign publications.

One major event in the period under review that should have merited more coverage than it got was a seminar on HIV/AIDS by the military, which held in Abuja during the month. Unfortunately, the event did not get adequate news mention. Only the *Daily Times*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay* reported the conference. Owing to the security implications of an HIV epidemic among the armed forces, the event deserved better coverage. The poor coverage can be attributed to poor engagement of the media by the organisers.

Reporters based outside the headquarters of their media organisations do not often give detailed coverage to special events like conferences and meetings. Because they often have competing assignments, correspondents usually limit their participation at such events to the opening ceremonies, where they expect invited dignitaries to make newsworthy statements. This explains why many HIV/AIDS news emanating from Abuja, Nigeria's federal capital, get poor coverage in the print media, since most national newspapers have their offices and printing presses in Lagos. Suggestions to overcome this drawback could include sponsorship of Lagos-based health reporters to attend these events, or engagement of prominent media-based HIV/AIDS organisations to provide coverage.

Focus of coverage in March: out of the 101 stories reported, 42 were on awareness, 25 on prevention, 22 on treatment and 12 on advocacy. Awareness for example refers to stories that focus on activities and pronouncements providing information on the virus for the readers. However, much as awareness, prevention and treatment are important in the campaign against AIDS, what the findings of the monitoring exercise indicate is the need for more advocacy on the rights of People Living with AIDS (PLWHA). PLWHA groups, and people and organisations working to confront stigma, need to speak up more so that the media can help end HIV-related stigma.

There were however some stories in the media which addressed the stigma problem. *National Interest* of March 27 for example, had a full page report on access to justice for women titled 'Women vs HIV/AIDS: The right and access to justice'. This article, written by Jones Idikio, a legal practitioner, was obviously a paper presented at an earlier workshop, a fact not stated in the publication. After a review of related cases in other countries, the writer argues that PLWHA in Nigeria are still capable of exercising their rights whenever they are discriminated against.

On March 21, *The Guardian* carried an editorial, the only one in the period under review, titled 'The HIV/AIDS campaign'. The editorial reviewed the progress recorded so far in the campaign and recalled when people hid behind figures and denied existence of the virus, to now when many are opening up. It called for enlightenment programmes to warn citizens against unprotected casual sex, prostitution and indiscriminate use of unscreened blood. "Strengthening the

health system and protecting people against a broad range of opportunistic diseases should be considered a major step in contacting (sic) the HIV/AIDS pandemic", the paper stated.

The editorial was very timely; it is commendable that the paper, the country's most prestigious national daily, found it necessary to write on the issue and remind the government and the public on what should be done to sustain the battle against the epidemic. Unlike opinion articles, editorials carry a lot of weight being the media organisation's informed opinions and are shapers of public opinion.

One of the major goals of this research is to determine the quality of HIV/AIDS coverage in the media. In the month under review, there were indications that while the rules guiding the appropriate use of language in HIV/AIDS reporting were observed in many of the reports, there were still violations. Lack of attribution of the sources of some stories and poor identification of some of the contributing writers were other lapses noticed in the reports.

For example, in the *National Interest* of March 27, a report titled 'HIV/AIDS: A scourge and its many controversies' was replete with stigmatizing language that should have been removed before publishing, especially since the writer was obviously not a staff of the organization. Among such language in the piece are 'deadly disease' (avoid using alarming and descriptive language; AIDS is simply a disease), 'scourge' - this implies that HIV/AIDS cannot be controlled and is deserved punishment; use instead 'epidemic' or 'pandemic'), and 'victims' (people living with HIV/AIDS is preferable).

Unlike in the past when sensationalism of HIV stories was very common in the media, the March reports had only few cases of sensationalism. One such case was a story in the *Sunday Champion* of March 23 titled 'HIV victim to lose arm'. The sub-editor who cast the headline apparently sought to capitalize on the unverified claim of the accused, found guilty of stealing under Sharia law, that he was HIV-positive. But for the desire to sensationalize the story, it would have sufficed to title the story "Another Sharia victim to lose arm". Even if the accused was actually living with HIV, calling him a victim is stigmatization which discourages people living with HIV from openly coming to terms with their status.

*The Sunday Tribune* of March 24 had another equally disturbing report titled 'Animal shares HIV/AIDS drug with human beings'. The headline of the story, published in the gossip column of the paper, is clearly misleading, since what the writer intended was to criticize an unproven allegation that antiretroviral drugs being imported into the country had not undergone human trials.

According to the four-paragraph report, the drugs, believed to have been imported from India at the cost of \$4 million were only tested on rats. Instead of tucking this sensitive story in a gossip column, the writer would have acted more

responsibly by investigating the story before raising alarm. If the story turns out to be baseless (and the story did not offer any evidence to prove its allegation), *Sunday Tribune* may have succeeded in publishing rumour as fact, and spreading an untruth.

Once in a while, there was a noticeable drought in HIV/AIDS stories. For four days in the month (March 18, 19, 25 and 30), all the newspapers had not a single HIV-related story.

Appropriate use of illustrative pictures seems to be a major problem with most of the newspapers. Many feature-length stories were not accompanied by illustrative pictures. This is a challenge to communications staff of NGOs, government agencies etc, to supply the media with appropriate pictures to accompany coverage of HIV-related activities.

Cartoons are one good way to transmit HIV/AIDS messages in the press. The weekly cartoon strip on the back page of the *Sunday Punch* stands out as a good example of this. The cartoon strip titled 'Let's talk about HIV/AIDS' seeks to educate readers about the epidemic and correct popular misconceptions about the disease. The strip appears to be contribution to the anti-AIDS campaign by the paper's management and this should be commended as a good example of corporate social responsibility.

Overall, in the month under review, the *Post Express* topped the list of published HIV-related stories with 15, followed by *The Guardian*, *ThisDay* and *Daily Times* which had 12 stories each. Regrettably, *The Punch*, touted as the nation's largest circulating newspaper, had the lowest figure of three (3).

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

Newspapers Monitored:	11
Total Reports:	101
News reports:	66
Newsfeatures:	24
Opinion articles and interviews:	10
Editorial:	01
Focus of Reports:	
Awareness:	42
Prevention	25
Treatment	22
Advocacy	12

## **HEALTH INSURANCE AND PLWHAS (APRIL 2002)**

Newsfeatures on HIV/AIDS are not unusual in Nigerian newspapers. However, the newsfeature in the *Comet* of April 30 titled 'Discrimination: National Health Insurance scheme throws 20million people in the cold', stands out as a very good investigative and analytical piece that draws attention to the exclusion of People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) from an health scheme meant to cater for all Nigerians.

Spread over a record four pages, the report critically examines the National Insurance Scheme as it affects PLWHAs and cancer patients. The article highlights the hypocrisy displayed by government in its claim of catering for this group .

Though they must contribute money to the National Health Scheme, PLWHAs and cancer patients are excluded from its protection because their condition was said to be terminal and expensive to manage.

This outstanding report is the highlight of the print media coverage of HIV/AIDS issues in **April** during which a total of **106** stories were published in eleven publications.

A breakdown of the published stories showed that **86** were news, **16** Features and **7** opinion articles. The number of stories published in April was not significantly different compared to that of March during which **102** stories were published.

**March** however had **66** news stories, **24** Features and **10** opinion/interviews.

*Daily Champion* edged out Post Express in April as the paper with the highest number of stories. It had 14 while Post Express and Vanguard had 13 each. Post Express had topped in March with 15 stories.

The Punch, which had the least published stories in March, had eight in April leaving *The Guardian* at the bottom of the table in April.

Throughout the month of April, only one story titled **UNIZIK offers course on AIDS** published on April 26 in *Champion* made the cover out of all the papers monitored.

While editors reserve the right to determine cover stories, there were two instances during the month when HIV/AIDS –related events could have been on either the front or back pages of the newspapers, but were not.

The first was when President Olusegun Obasanjo called for compulsory HIV test for Nigerians. This important call, coming from the President, should have merited front-page mention but it did not.

The opening remarks of the then Senate president, Chief Anyim Pius Anyim, at the opening of a workshop on HIV/AIDS by the National Assembly, was another event that should have attracted front page treatment. Anyim was reported as saying that the country required divine intervention to solve the AIDS problem. His statement confirmed the seriousness of the problem, and would have attracted cover treatment if he had made such statement about other issues.

Beyond statements by Anyim and the then Speaker, Alhaji Umar Ghali Na'Abba, the media reports did not include presentations by other speakers. As it turned out, the reading public did not have the opportunity of knowing what really transpired at the workshop, and there was no follow up report of any kind.

National Assembly correspondents, who would have been responsible for covering the workshop, were probably more interested in political matters than the very important health matter of HIV/AIDS.

It is however noteworthy that *Thisday* of April 23 had a good preview news feature on the National Assembly workshop titled **AIDS and Drug controversy**. The article was a good example of how the media can set the agenda on any issue of national interest.

Another news feature titled **How Soldiers Battle AIDS**, published by *Thisday* of April 10, was also an indication of an improvement in the quality of news features on the pandemic published in April. The article reviewed the spread of the disease in the Armed Forces and the various steps taken to combat it.

Besides the statistics, the report included interviews with not only the coordinator of the Nigerian Armed Forces Programme on AIDS, but ex-military men living with HIV/AIDS. If anyone had doubt about how serious the HIV/AIDS pandemic is in the armed forces, the report presented a clear picture.

Often, reports on HIV/AIDS are usually opinions of senior government officials, activists and experts. **Vox Pop**, a question and answer section in *Sunday Champion* however provided a good opportunity to get the opinion of the ordinary man on the campaign. President Olusegun Obasanjo had called for compulsory HIV test for Nigerians. *Sunday Champion* sought the opinion of eight persons on the street. Seven supported the call, while only one opposed it.

As in March, use of inappropriate language remained a problem in both headlines and body of stories. Objectionable words like **victims** and **deadly disease** kept re-occurring in some stories.

*The Guardian* of April 13 had a headline titled 'Obasanjo urges AIDS Test for Nigerians'. While there is HIV test, AIDS test does not exist as AIDS is diagnosed according to specific medical criteria that identify the symptoms.

The Punch also made a similar mistake in its headline of April 27 in a story titled '56,000 people have AIDS in Osun.' The Comet of the same day however had a more appropriate headline-'56, 000 infected with HIV/AIDS in Osun'.

People can become infected with HIV but not AIDS, which is a group of illnesses. In another report of April 28, *Vanguard* had 'Babangida flays **stigma** on HIV/AIDS victims'. The use of victims in the headline unfortunately reinforces one of the wrong notions about HIV/AIDS.

Instead of *victims*, which suggest that the infected persons are powerless, *Persons Living with HIV* is the recommended language.

To ensure that appropriate language is used for HIV/AIDS reports, media-focused organisations working in the field of HIV/AIDS should sustain the current education of all cadre of media staff involved newspaper production.

Newspaper and magazine sub-editors and other line editors should be included in training sessions, as evidence abounds of where they use inappropriate words in the headlines while the body of the stories may not have such words.

Many line editors seem to have stock phrases or words for use in headlines and it will take constant reminders to make them change.

It is also suggested that health correspondents who know the appropriate words should endeavor to point out wrong usage when they occur.

Finding appropriate pictures to illustrate newsfeatures is a problem for some publications, especially *Post Express*. Virtually every edition of the health pages carry pictures of the Director of the Lagos State AIDS Control Task Force, Dr Desalu and the then Health Minister, Professor Alphonsus Nwosu. It is suggested that health correspondents of media houses that do not have enough photographs make conscious efforts to source them, while stakeholders in the sector can assist by sending pictures of their events to the media houses.

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

Newspapers Monitored:	11
Total Reports:	109
News reports	86
Newsfeatures	16
Opinion articles:	07
Focus of Coverage:	
Awareness/Prevention	63
Treatment	27
Cure Claims	06
Advocacy	13

## **RED CROSS DAY AND AFTERMATH (MAY 2002)**

Apart from the various health problems people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) have to cope with, one social problem they've also had to contend with is stigmatisation.

Despite the intense campaigns against some unfounded fears about the virus, many still find it difficult to relate with infected persons for fear of getting infected and some label such people '**HIV Victims**' to embarrass them.

This attitude towards PLWHAs might have informed the action of a man who, according to a front-page report in the *Nigerian Tribune* of May 24, alleged that his former wife was HIV- positive.

**Titled: Man In Sharia Court For Saying Ex-Wife Has HIV**, *Tribune* reports that a 22- year- old divorcee, Hawau Ja' afar had sued her former husband, Malam Danladi Jibrin at a Sharia Court for alleging that she was HIV- positive. Hawa'u claimed that the allegations against her were untrue and meant to make it difficult to marry another man, but her ex-husband, displaying a result of HIV screening test from a diagnostic laboratory, insisted that she tested positive to HIV.

In using this report, especially on the front page, the only one for the month in all the papers monitored, the *Tribune* succeeded in creating an awareness that false allegation about people's HIV status is a criminal offence.

This story will definitely help in the anti-stigma campaign if people read it. It would have been interesting to know how the case ended. Unfortunately, there has been no further report on the case, which was adjourned till May 27. Even if *Tribune* failed to follow up the story, others should have picked it up.

Coincidentally, the campaign against stigmatisation of PLWHAs attracted a lot of coverage in May, courtesy of the theme of this year's Red Cross Day celebration, which was "**Open Your Eyes-Stigma Kills**"

The president of the Nigerian chapter of the organisation, Mr. Emmanuel Ijewere, was quoted as saying that Red Cross was launching a global campaign to reduce HIV/AIDS- related stigma and discrimination, pass on the truth about the virus and warn against the dangers of stigmatising those who are infected or their families.

All the publications monitored carried stories and pictures on the nationwide Red Cross celebration. It was indeed a good way of raising awareness on the dangers of stigmatisation. Some of the headlines of stories published included, "**Open Your Eyes, Stigma Kills**" in the *Post Express* of May 15, **Red Cross Seeks**

**Support For HIV/AIDS, *Champion*, May 15, AIDS Test To Cost N300 In Anambra, Vanguard May 17 and HIV/AIDS Prevalent In Ebonyi, the *Punch* May 14. *The Post Express* also had a half page picture splash of the celebration, with Red Cross members carrying banners with messages like “**The truth about AIDS, pass it on.. it could have been you or your beloved.**” Perhaps the lesson from the awareness raising celebration is the need to encourage as many organisations as possible, to join in the battle against the disease instead of leaving it to the health sector and HIV/AIDS non-governmental organisations (NGOs) alone. May recorded 115 reports published on HIV/AIDS with a breakdown showing 58 news stories, 22 newsfeatures, 8 opinion articles and 1 editorial.**

The month recorded a high number of pictures used to illustrate HIV/AIDS stories, thanks again to the Red Cross Day and the Nigerian Medical Association conference in Minna, Niger State. The public relations unit of GSK pharmaceutical company must have been at work, as the company had the picture of her HIV manager used in many papers instead of other participants at the conference.

Except for use of some inappropriate words like *Scourge*, *Victims* which recurred in stories, the quality of stories published was high. 12 were rated very good, 84 good, 15 fair, while only two were regarded as poor. 105 had appropriate headlines, while only 10 had inappropriate headlines. 94 stories were original, while 21 were culled.

Like in April, only one editorial was published on AIDS in May. *The Vanguard* in an editorial titled ‘Need for AIDS Awareness Scheme’, stressed the need for the committee in charge of dispensing the Federal Government anti-retroviral drugs to embark on an enlightenment and sensitisation campaign.

Against the background of the reported poor turn -out of infected persons for the Federal Government drugs, the paper noted that a new campaign “will impress on the carriers the need to come forward to collect drugs for their health stability.”

The editorial puts the issue in perspective as it urged PLWHAs to be supportive of the Federal Government’s efforts to rid society of the AIDS virus. “By so doing,” the paper stated, “they will be doing not only themselves, but the entire society a great service”. Considering the pandemic nature of the spread of the virus, other papers need to emulate *the Vanguard* in writing editorials on HIV.

Apart from the editorials, it is noteworthy that some columnists and writers give attention to HIV issues, especially from non-health perspectives like the rights of PLWHAs.

*The Post Express* of May 8, 2002 had a newsfeature titled 'Ethical Principles for HIV/AIDS Clinical Trials: A visit of the Nuremberg Code' written by Ebenezer Durojaiye, an attorney with the Center for the Right to Health (CRH), Lagos.

Dr. Jane Francis Duru a family care columnist, also wrote on 'Human Rights and HIV/AIDS' in the May 14 edition of *Post Express*. Both writers harped on the need for the rights of infected persons to be respected regarding informed consent, pre-test counselling, consent for drug administration, confidential safeguard against social discrimination and societal support. The newsfeature on the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) conference in *Post Express* May 23 edition, underscored the need for newspapers to go beyond perfunctory reports of major events. Titled **Niger 2002: Challenges of AIDS Scourge**, though the use of **Scourge** in its headline is inappropriate, the almost full-page report gave a detailed account of the views of various participants at the conference. The writer did not limit himself to the speeches, but interviewed participants and spiced his report with facts and opinions from other sources on HIV/AIDS.

While newspapers need to write more human-interest reports on the virus, they have to be careful in their choice of interview subjects, and writers also need to be objective.

A full-page article titled **Ex-HIV Victim (another wrong usage) Recounts His Spiritual Healing** by the *Post Express* on Saturday May 25, would have been a commendable piece, especially with the new emphasis on faith-based approach to combating HIV/AIDS, but for the bias shown by the writer. The report was on one Paul Akarigbo, who supposedly got healed of HIV at the Synagogue Church of Nations after prayers from Prophet Temitope Joshua. After adopting a style of writing that made him sound more like a church man than an objective reporter, the writer, Joseph Aimenmnone, confirmed his bias by accusing the press of publishing 'all sorts of negative reports about Paul Akarigbo'.

*"Apparently, the Nigerian Press, believing he was dead, has been celebrating what could aptly be tagged as a campaign of pull him down and by extension, the work of God,"* the writer stated. If Akarigbo himself had made the above statement, it would have been understandable. However, the writer, perhaps because of his interest in the matter, chooses to do an editorial to validate the claim of the "healed" PLWHA.

Considering the belief of some Nigerians in spiritual healing, editors need to be very careful about the testimony they publish to protect readers their from doubtful claims.

If the campaign against AIDS is to be effective, the media should not only publish or broadcast in English, but in other languages understood by Nigerians. The May 17 publication in the *Lagos Weekend* titled **AIDS Don Kill Bosun Bonsway**, written in pidgin English, is a good example of how more people

could be reached with the HIV/AIDS campaign. Although pidgin English is used a lot in the broadcast media, only *Lagos Weekend*, (an insert in *Daily Times*), among the papers monitored, has provision for it. The half page story is about the sex escapades of one Bosun who contracted HIV after an affair with a female colleague and later died of AIDS- related complications.

Newspapers in Nigerian languages need to publish HIV/AIDS-related reports to broaden the reach of the campaign against the spread of the virus. Presently, notable Yoruba publications like **Alaroye** and **Akede**, one of which is being monitored, have not had any HIV/AIDS report since the commencement of the monitoring in March.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

Newspapers Monitored:	11
Total Reports:	115
News reports	58
Newsfeatures	22
Opinion articles	08
Editorial	01
Focus of Coverage:	
Awareness/Prevention	75
Treatment/Care	24
Advocacy	04
Cure Claims	04
Policy pronouncements	06

## **REPS DISMISS ANTI-HIV VACCINES (JUNE 2002)**

Just when it seemed that HIV/AIDS cure claimants would continue to have a field day peddling their drugs without any law to protect citizens in search of HIV/AIDS treatment, the recent pronouncement on the issue by the House of Representative Committee on Health was timely.

The daily newspapers expectedly feasted on the event in **June** with various reports on the House of Representatives' dismissal of the local anti - HIV vaccines and reactions to the decision.

*The Vanguard*, in its June 12 edition, had on its front page the report titled "Report dismisses anti-HIV vaccines: Asks NAFDAC to Prosecute Claimants"

The report stated that the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), has been asked to prosecute anyone claiming to cure HIV/AIDS, following the findings of the National Institute for Pharmaceutical Research and Development (NIPRD) that all the anti-HIV vaccines had no effect on the virus.

Only *Vanguard* gave this important announcement front-page treatment, but the reactions that followed the pronouncement, especially that of some of the prominent cure claimants like Dr. Jeremiah Abalaka, were well reported.

A press conference was addressed by Abalaka during which he insisted that his anti-HIV vaccines were potent and his claim was reported by virtually all the papers with pictures to complement them.

A sample of the headlines on June 18 include *Tribune: Abalaka Faults Reps, Restates Claim On AIDS Cure*; *Daily Times; Abalaka Faults Reps Over Planned Prosecution Of Claimants Of HIV Curative Vaccines* and *Thisday, AIDS Cure: Abalaka Disputes NIPRD Claims*. *The Punch* had a picture of the controversial doctor addressing the press in its June 18 edition.

Better still, *Thisday* had a news analysis on the controversy titled "**AIDS Cure and The Burden Of Proof**", in its June 23 edition.

The writer, Funso Abdulahi, presented the various perspectives to the controversy and advocated that "*these drugs should be made to go through strict scientific tests, if necessary abroad. If any of them scale through, that is a fact for Nigeria but if it is certain they are not genuine, they should be stopped*"

In its Natural Health pages of July 27, *The Comet* had a one-and-half-page interview with Dr. Jacob Abdullahi, another prominent cure claimant and former staff of NIPRD, who faulted the institute's report and requested that it should be presented at a scientific forum for critical analysis.

Apart from news and features, the controversy also attracted an editorial comment by the *Vanguard* and an opinion by one of Nigeria's most widely read columnists- Dr. Olatunji Dare- in *The Comet*.

*Vanguard*, in its editorial of June 25 titled **Revisiting anti-HIV vaccines**, commended the pronouncement of the House of Representatives based on the NIPRD findings. According to the paper, *“it is even surprising that people who have spent years in the scientific community can expect the world to accept a scientific claim which is not subjected to test by anybody else”*.

While giving Abalaka benefit of doubt, Dr. Dare, a US- based journalism teacher in his piece **“Between Science and quackery”**, faulted the doctor's approach. *“It is possible that a cure already exists in Dr. Abalaka's serum. But why is he pushing the serum with the crassness of a peddler, rather than the cool detachment of a trained scientist? Why is he unwilling to submit the serum to international inspection and authentication?”*

The print media coverage of the HIV cure controversy deserves commendation, given the diversity of views on the issue published in the publications monitored. Perhaps because of the scientific basis for the clampdown on the claimant, the reactions this time, unlike before, have been supportive of the move to prevent further exploitation of the PLWHAs.

Apart from the claimants themselves, there were no media reports condemning the House of Representatives' stand.

Compared to past months, June turned out to have more front and back page reports on HIV/AIDS issues.

The workshop on “HIV/AIDS and Education in Nigeria”, held in Abuja on June 10, was widely reported by the papers with *Thisday* and *Times* having the event on their front pages. *The Guardian* had a story from the workshop as its lead story on its back page on June 11. Though it had the story in its inside news page, *The Punch* had a photograph from the event on its front page.

The newspapers based their reports on the funds needed by the Federal Government to combat AIDS and the concern of President Obasanjo over the spread of the disease despite efforts to contain it.

All together, 161 stories were published by the eleven newspapers monitored in June. A breakdown showed that *Comet* and *Post Express* topped with 25 stories each. *Thisday* and *Daily Times* followed with 18 each and *Guardian* and *Champion* 16 each.

*Punch* published 13, *Tribune* 11, *Vanguard* 10, *Anchor* 8 and *National Interest* 1. The sharp drop in the number of stories on HIV published in the *National Interest* is attributable to the non-regular publication of the newspaper. Unlike

before when it published daily and was among the papers that had more stories on HIV/AIDS. Its publication has become irregular, sometimes publishing only twice a week.

During the month, there were some outstanding human interest newsfeatures that deserve commendation. For example, *Thisday* on June 27 had a story titled **HIV/AIDS: Beyond Children's innocence**, which focused on the effect of the pandemic on children, who were aptly described as the vulnerable group.

The report is well researched as it includes statistics and accounts of various groups working to protect and care for children affected by the virus, either directly or through their parents.

The report, appropriately illustrated with a picture of one Anna Murenga, a 66-year-old grandmother with eight orphaned grandchildren whom she takes care of in Chipulukasu compound in Ndola, northern Zambia.

*The Champion* also had another good newsfeature titled **Women: Cruel Caricature of the HIV Scourge**, based on a panel discussion organised by UNAIDS in collaboration with the National Centre for Women Development (NCWD), Abuja.

This report makes interesting reading, especially because of the extensive use of the testimony of one Doris Okon from Akwa Ibom State, who is a PLWHA. The feature is further made reader-friendly by the highlighted quotes from the testimony which will encourage readers to take a second look at it.

*"Now if you sympathize with me, you are drawing me back, the only thing you can do is to encourage me, because sympathy in this situation does not help. It makes one to think and once you think too much you can die"*, Doris was quoted as telling the audience at the workshop.

Like the *Thisday* feature, the *Champion* report also had a very appropriate picture of a widow living in Ogobia, a community in Benue State with her two daughters and two other AIDS orphans.

However, the *Weekend Extra* pull-out in the *Sunday Punch* of June 16 would have been another good example of how to draw attention to the plight of PLWHAs but for the sensational headline.

In the three-page report titled: **My Story by S' Leonean lady who spreads HIV**, the headline gives an erroneous impression that Winifred Williams deliberately spreads the virus to "innocent men".

She is further described as *"a time bomb on the prowl looking for who to devour"* when in fact, the lady is a victim of lecherous men who take advantage of her need for money to indulge in sex with her.

As Williams stated in the interview, she does not hide her HIV status from men whom she seeks assistance from.

*“Yes, I do tell most of them. Many of them still insist. They tell you, don’t worry; we would take care of ourselves. I even used to show them the paper I was carrying that I have HIV. Many of them would even not use condom. They don’t like it”, Williams explains.*

Instead of stigmatising Williams as a lady who spreads HIV, a headline like “A story of a refugee living with HIV” would have been more appropriate.

*Sunday Punch* however still deserves commendation for publishing the report as it not only draws attention to the plight of female refugees in the country, it gives a clue to why the HIV virus continues to spread despite the campaigns by various groups on the use of condoms.

*Sunday Punch* also did a good job by speaking to Williams’ doctor and counselor, Dr Wole Daini, Programme Officer of the Civil Society Consultative Group in Nigeria (CISGHAN), who rightly maintained, “she needs to be assisted, not persecuted”.

Despite the front page coverage for the Abuja workshop organised by the Ministry of Women Affairs and National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA), earlier mentioned, it is worrisome that the important conference was completely ignored by *Champion*, *Post Express*, *Anchor* and *Vanguard*. Only *Punch* had a photograph of the event out of the eleven papers monitored.

Lack of follow-up and timely reports of the international AIDS conference is another noticeable flaw in the media coverage this month. In the first week of June, most of the newspapers reported an AIDS conference in South Africa but after the first day, there was no follow-up on the proceedings. Some newspapers even reported the event two days late.

When newspapers rely on foreign news agencies for reports on such conferences, it is suggested that health correspondents take time to monitor the proceedings throughout the duration.

It is not good enough that newspapers report the opening ceremony and keep readers in the dark afterwards, especially on issues that affect the continent.

The South African conference, organised by UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation (WHO), was a major conference on tackling AIDS in Africa by securing funds for research and development of AIDS vaccine, which should have attracted better coverage.

## **HIGHLIGHTS**

**Newspapers Monitored: 11**

**Total Reports: 161**

**Focus of Coverage: Awareness/Prevention-100; Treatment/Care-46; Advocacy-12; Litigation-4; Statistics-5**

## **NATIONAL AIDS ALLIANCE CONFERENCE (JULY 2002)**

If any international conference deserved wide coverage by the Press, the 14th International AIDS Conference held in Barcelona, Spain from July 7 to 12 did, for obvious reasons.

With the high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS infection in the country and the continent, the Barcelona conference was another opportunity for the print media to draw attention to the pandemic nature of the virus and steps taken to combat it worldwide.

The media was expected to be awash with reports before, during and after the conference. Unfortunately, it did not attract much attention from the media. The print media monitoring for July revealed that there were virtually no major pre-conference newsfeatures to review past conferences and set agenda for the fourteenth edition. The biennial conference was important enough to be a subject of editorial comment, but none of the eleven publications thought it fit to write on it.

Only *Daily Times*, a day after the commencement of the conference on July 8, had an almost full page report titled "Alliance against Killer Infection", which reported the efforts of various stakeholders in the HIV/AIDS campaign.

In all, nine reports were published on the conference. Out of the nine, *The Guardian* had one on its back page of July 11 titled "Global Bodies Move to Tackle AIDS Scourge" written by its reporter who attended the conference - Ebere Ahanihu.

*Tribune* however had two front page stories on the conference almost a week after it began. Unfortunately, the first report of July 17, which was a lead story titled **Generals Die of AIDS**, based on a United States National Public Radio report on the presentation of Col. Wale Egbewunmi of the Nigeria Army at the Barcelona conference, was refuted on the second day by *Nigerian Tribune* in another front page story titled "US radio misquoted colonel on AIDS" on July 18.

Perhaps if *Nigerian Tribune* had exercised restraint and checked the US radio report with the Nigeria military authorities whose officer was reportedly quoted, it would not have been guilty of sensationalism.

The story in question was indeed a good example of negative HIV/AIDS news being good news for the print media. Apart from *The Guardian*, all other newspapers monitored relied on foreign agency reports, which explains why

newspaper readers were denied detailed reports of the proceedings of an important conference which attracted over 14,000 participants.

Despite the poor coverage of the Barcelona conference, the newspapers monitored still recorded a high number of HIV/AIDS stories in July. Overall, 212 stories were published with news stories topping as usual with 165 items, 27 newsfeatures, 19 opinion articles and one letter to the editor. There was no editorial on HIV/AIDS throughout the month.

Out of the 165 news stories, three were five front-page stories and three back page reports. This is an improvement on the past month, although some of the stories, like the two in *Tribune*, turned out to be sensational. The front-page report of the *Post Express* on Sunday, July 7 titled: **AIDS Patient Goes On Rampage In Oturkpo... Infects Over 200 Girls**, reads more like fiction than fact. The report was about a faceless young man said to be living with HIV/AIDS in Oturkpo, Benue State, who reportedly had sexual relationship with over 200 teenage girls after discovering his status.

The man was said to have embarked on a sex spree with his victims, most of whom were secondary school students, in revenge for allegedly contracting HIV from one of them.

With the name of the man excluded, no credible quoted sources, like the hospital where he died, the *Post Express* story lacked any substance and could not be believed. Even when the report said some non-governmental organizations were searching for some of the girls likely to have been infected by him, the names of the NGOs were not mentioned and their officials were not quoted.

The report would have been more appropriate on a gossip page than on the front page of a national newspaper. *The Comet* lead story on July 24 titled: **25 Nigerian Nurses In Britain 'Test Positive' To HIV** is however a particularly good one but with an inappropriate headline. Based on a report from *The Times* of London, the story alerts Nigerian health workers desperate for greener pastures overseas that they must take HIV test, following a discovery that 25 out of 432 Nigerian nurses engaged in Britain last year may have tested positive to the virus that causes AIDS.

Since the thrust of the story is about the new HIV test requirement for aspiring Nigerian nurses and others from the continent, the headline of the story should not have been on the 25 HIV-positive Nigerian nurses. Other cover stories include: **Four National Assembly staff live with HIV** on the cover page of the *Punch* of July 23, **Researchers In HIV Blocking Gene Breakthrough and Novel Glaxo Aids Drugs Clears First Hurdle**, both on the pages of *the Comet* of July 15 and 9 respectively. *The Comet* led other papers with its cover (front and back page) stories, *Tribune*- 2, *Punch* -1 and *Post Express*- 1.

The high point of the newspaper coverage in July is the wide coverage of the activities of the National AIDS Alliance (NAA), a non-governmental network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) on July 1, 2002. Almost all the newspapers published reports and pictures of the conference. The plan by the NAA to launch *AIDS-on-Line*, a live phone-in-programme on selected radio and television was also well-reported.

The wide coverage for NAA event, especially the use of pictures of the officials, was good as it helped reinforce the message that PLWHAs can live normal lives.

Among the published stories is: **Group Launches AIDS-On-Line**, in *The Comet* of July 8. The quarter page report had a picture of two officials of NAA and a funding agency, picture of international conference on the back page of *Guardian* on July 2, *Vanguard* of July 2 and stories in *Thisday*, *Daily Times* and *The Punch*. The lesson here is that the media may be willing to give positive coverage to activities of PLWHAs as often as they are organized. When accused of not giving adequate coverage to HIV/AIDS events, the reason the editors give is that they can only report events and not generate them. What is therefore required for more coverage of activities of PLWHAs is that those concerned should stage activities which the media must be kept abreast of.

Issues concerning HIV/AIDS go beyond health. AIDS activists have always argued that it has implications for every sector, especially the economy. *Guardian* and *Daily Times* had extensive reports on probable effects of HIV/AIDS on the economy, if not checked. *The Guardian* report on its popular *Appointment Pages* of July 9, had an equivalent of a full page article titled **"AIDS Threatens 60% Of Nigeria's Professionals"**.

The report was based on a position paper by Mr. Yemi Oshilaja, Executive Director, Hope Worldwide, a non-governmental organization, which estimated that 60 percent of Nigerian professionals could be eliminated if "stitch in time" measures are not taken.

Huge funds expended on management training schemes, according to Oshilaja, could be wasted, "if those on off-shore programmes are not adequately briefed on precautionary measures to adopt in preventing infection."

The *Daily Times* in its report on *Working Times* pages titled **Battling HIV/AIDS Scourge In The Workplace**, focused on efforts of the National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions Employees, (NUBIFIE), to alert its members on the impact of HIV/AIDS.

Apart from carrying out the enlightenment programme, NUBIFIE is also involved in a Training of Trainers (TOT) programme to enlarge the scope of those who would be available to carry the campaign to the grassroots, justifying the need for workplace HIV/AIDS campaign. Emmanuel Ekpenyong, the writer of the article, concludes that *"the nation's work-force should be its most priced commodity*

*and it is only a healthy work-force that can guarantee economic growth for the nation”.*

Dr. Jane Francis Duru, in the *Post Express* of July 5, also focused on the impact of HIV/AIDS on business, noting, *“It is an issue that goes to the very core of business practices”.*

According to her, *“No sector of the economy is immune to the impact of HIV/AIDS. Through higher morbidity and mortality, the disease leads to reduction in the available productive and skilled labour and in investment”.* In the month under review, there was also a noticeable increase in the number of interesting newsfeatures on HIV/AIDS in the eleven newspapers focusing on various aspects of the campaign.

A particularly outstanding one is the feature culled from the *Sunday Times* of London titled **“My Guilt as an HIV survivor”**, reprinted by *Sunday Punch* (1 1/2 pages) and *Champion* (1 page). The story is about one Andrew Sullivan who through access to drugs, has been able to live with HIV for nine years but is now haunted by the millions in Africa dying of the disease.

*“Every year, as I mark my HIV anniversary, I slip into a depression born of a sense of betrayal of those I have left behind”*, Sullivan was quoted as saying. While the newspapers did well in publishing Sullivan’s story, they will need to publish similar interesting stories of Nigerian PLWHA’s. It is not enough to claim that Nigerian PLWHA’s are not willing to speak openly about their status, they have to be encouraged to do so without being stigmatized

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

Newspapers Monitored: 11

Total Reports: 212 (News reports-165, Newsfeatures-27, Opinion articles-19, Letter to the editor-1)

Focus of Coverage: Awareness/Prevention-163; Treatment/Care-41; Advocacy-2; Litigation-6

## **OSOTIMEHIN REPLACES AKINSETE AT NACA (AUGUST 2002 )**

Morenike Taire, a female writer with the *Vanguard*, may not be nationally acclaimed, but she is one of the few female columnists of note in the country.

For three consecutive weeks in August, she demonstrated a commendable concern for the HIV/AIDS campaign in her half-page weekly column. In every edition of her *Speaking Out* column, one out of the two issues she wrote about was the HIV/AIDS campaign.

On August 13, she wrote on **Wither the Virus? Why the condom has failed** on August 19 and **The Catholic Church and Condom** on August 27. Taire noted that the HIV/AIDS campaign was not recording much success due to poverty, and traditional and cultural practices, arguing that the campaign has to be taken seriously by all.

*“It is being argued that the reason we are standing on land mines and not paying attention is because HIV is a relatively unseen disease which is killing few and therefore less needful of attention than malaria, hypertension and such like.*

*“But this unfortunately, is the nature of AIDS. By the time it’s visible enough to be seen, it’s too late”.* Taire’s concern for the HIV/AIDS campaign is a good example of how serious newspaper columnists need to draw attention to the pandemic.

Apart from Taire’s column, there were other opinion articles and newsfeatures on HIV/AIDS in August, which indicates that the media, more than ever before, is interested in reporting the disease beyond the usual perfunctory, mentions.

In a generous six-page report, *Vanguard* ran the text of discussion at its *Conference Hall*, which theme was **HIV/AIDS In The Workplace**. The publication is a major contribution to the HIV/AIDS campaign in work-places, which have not been given much media attention in the past.

Against the background of the claim by the International Labour Organization (ILO) that at least twenty million workers in the prime labour force are infected worldwide by HIV, participants at the conference discussed aspects of the HIV campaign in Nigeria with emphasis on preventing decimation of the nation’s work- force.

Other notable reports in the month included two-page newsfeature in *The Guardian* of August 3, titled, **Barcelona, Nigerian Delegates Set New HIV/AIDS Agenda**. In the *Daily Times* of August 3, a full-page report was

titled **Catholic Priests To Fight Sexual Immorality. HIV/AIDS: We Must Act Fast On Sexuality Education** by *Sunday Punch* on August 27, and a two-page interview titled **“Government Can Do More To Help People Living With HIV/AIDS”**; **“Living Positively With HIV/AIDS”**, *Thisday* of August 6, 2002.

In all, the newspapers monitored had **209** reports on HIV/AIDS. As usual, news stories topped with **159** reports. *Tribune* had the only editorial of the month titled: **Nigeria, UK Nurses And HIV**, while there were five cartoons. In the month, seven news stories were published on the front and back pages. The stories included **AIDS Ravages Girls College, National Assembly** on the front page of *Saturday Champion* of August 27, **Deputy Governor, Senator Among 50,000 HIV Positive Nigerians - Expert**, *Vanguard*, August 24; and **Catholic Church Reaffirms Stand On HIV/AIDS Test Before Marriage**, back page *Tribune*, August 28. Others are: **AIDS: UNFPA Orders N127m Contraceptives For Nigeria** in *Daily Times* of August 8, **Compulsory HIV/AIDS Test for MOD Staff**, *Post Express* of August 8; **Community Hospitals To Benefit From Anti-Retroviral Drugs**, *Nigerian Tribune* August 26; and **AIDS: Foreign Agencies Okay \$185m For Nigeria** in *The Punch* of August 12.

Of all front-page stories, the *Saturday Vanguard* and *Champion* stories, which other newspapers missed, could aptly be described as the HIV/AIDS stories of the month. Both papers made what could be called shocking revelations on the spread of the virus in their lead stories.

However, while *Vanguard* reported the revelation by the coordinator of the National Network of People Living with AIDS, Dr. Pat Matemilola, that a deputy governor and National Assembly members are among the 50,000 Nigerians who have tested positive to HIV, *Champion* added a research finding that 34 female students of a popular secondary school in Lagos tested positive to HIV virus during a recent screening.

Comparatively, the *Vanguard* headline, **Dep. Governor, Senators Among 50,000 HIV Positive Nigerians - Expert** is more temperate than Saturday *Champion*'s **AIDS Ravages Girls College, National Assembly**. The *Vanguard* headline sums up the story as it is without any obvious attempt to sensationalise, but the *Champion* headline comes in the mode of the usual alarming slant to HIV/AIDS reporting.

Although *Champion* may be right in claiming in its headline that AIDS ravages the girls school, since 34 of 54 screened students of the unnamed school tested positive, the claim is not true for the National Assembly, since Matemilola was not categorical about the number of National Assembly members affected. The *Saturday Champion* story is therefore capable of creating a wrong impression, especially because the disclosure about the status of the elected officials was not

meant to ridicule them but to confirm the extent of spread of the virus in the country.

Considering the gravity of the disclosure and the need to further break the silence on the disease, it would have been better if the newspaper went a step further to identify the HIV- positive elected officials through some investigation. Unfortunately, *Vanguard* and *Champion* and other newspapers failed to pursue the lead offered by Matemilola, which could have helped in confirming that PLWHAs can live normal lives.

Lack of follow-up was also demonstrated by the newspapers on a two-year-old girl who was expelled by her school authorities following her mother's disclosure that she (the mother), was living with HIV.

Only the *Anchor* newspaper, which unfortunately is now rested, reported the story on August 8 under the headline **Two-Year-Old Girl Expelled From School For HIV/AIDS**. This is the kind of human interest HIV/AIDS story that should have attracted media coverage, to draw attention to the extent of discrimination against PLWHAs and their family members.

In this case, the media could have drawn attention to the psychological damage the expulsion could do to the two-year-old who may not understand why she is being denied the company of her playmates.

Further media reports on the case were also needed to highlight the fact that the child may not be infected but was expelled just because her mother is HIV-positive. The media needed to have taken up the school authorities for their action and give the report enough prominence to draw government's attention to the case.

If the HIV/AIDS campaign is to succeed, abuse of the rights of PLWHAs should not be condoned. The story of former South African President Nelson Mandela, losing three family members to AIDS also did not get deserved coverage in the month under review. Only *the Guardian* and *Vanguard* reported the story on their foreign pages on August 26.

It is important for the media to report developments like this as it helps sound the message that HIV/AIDS is no respecter of persons. Our leaders, hopefully, could also learn from reports like this that they need to break the silence on HIV/AIDS by speaking up when they, their families or associates test positive.

The frank admission by former health minister, Professor Olikoye Ransome-Kuti that popular musician, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, died of AIDS, in no small measure, helped in putting a face to the disease.

One positive and noticeable trend in the August monitoring is the diversity of reports on HIV/AIDS. Increasingly, reports on the epidemic seem to be moving away from the health pages to sections like entertainment and tourism.

Considering the wide readership entertainment pages attract, HIV/AIDS reports may get more attention if this trend is sustained. On August 17, *Daily Times* had a story titled “**Condom Nite Extravaganza**” on its *Saturday Vintage* entertainment page.

The report was about a night of music and HIV/AIDS education organized by Zap Entertainment with the support of Society for Family Health (SFH). *Post Express* on August 10 also had a story titled: **Ghanaian Artists Back AIDS Campaign**, while *The Comet* of Saturday, August 10, on Hospitality and Travels World page, had a story titled: **Study on HIV/AIDS In Hospitality Sector**.

It is good to know that the *Waka About* pidgin English column of the *Weekend Times*, which is noted for writing about sexual escapades, has recently been writing about effects of HIV/AIDS and indiscriminate sex. In its August 10 edition, the column had a story titled “**I Ask Caro For AIDS Certificate**”. The story stressed the need for HIV/AIDS education among ladies. Though fictional, stories like this could help reach the average literate newspaper readers.

For the first time in recent times, *Akede Agbaye*, a newspaper in Yoruba, had a half-page newsfeature under its health column that can be translated as, “**What You Should Know Translation?**”. To keep their readers abreast, it will be a worthwhile public service for local language newspapers to regularly publish reports on the pandemic.

One HIV/AIDS non-governmental organization that got good coverage in August is the Youth Empowerment Foundation (YEF). The one-year anniversary of the country’s first HIV/AIDS telephone hotline, a (YEF) project, was reported in almost all the newspapers.

August was indeed a good month for quality reporting of HIV/AIDS stories in the media. It is hoped that the coverage will be sustained.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

Newspapers Monitored 11  
Total Reports: 209 (News-159, Editorial-1)

## **FALLOUT OF BARCELONA AIDS CONFERENCE (SEPTEMBER 2002)**

From **209** reports in August to **136** in September, there was a considerable drop in the number of HIV/AIDS - related reports published by newspapers monitored this month.

The fall is not an indication of a loss of interest in publishing HIV/AIDS reports. Most of the major HIV/AIDS events in the month under review got wide coverage. Quality of news and newsfeatures remained high, with increased pictures, cartoons and illustrations.

The higher number of stories published in August was not unconnected with the International AIDS Conference, which ended in July, and made HIV/AIDS a topical issue. Many follow-up stories and analyses on the issues raised at the conference were written in August.

*Anchor*, a national daily, with a penchant for good coverage of HIV/AIDS issues, ceased publishing in August, thus reducing the reports on the virus published in September.

A breakdown of the reports published in September however revealed that *Thisday* topped with **23** stories, while *Comet* and *Daily Times* followed with **19** stories each. *Champion* had **8**, the least published by the nine newspapers monitored.

News reports as usual topped the September monitoring with **107** reports. **22** feature stories were published, including **5** interviews, while **7** opinion article were published. Unlike in previous months, no editorial was published on HIV/AIDS issues in September. There was also no major cover story on HIV/AIDS like in past months. Only the *Daily Times* of September had the report titled: **FG, US, UK Sign N17.2 Billion HIV/AIDS Control Pact** on its front page.

Other newspapers also had this story but surprisingly opted to publish it on the inside pages. The agreement tagged *Promoting Sexual, Reproductive health and HIV/AIDS reduction programme in Nigeria* for a six-year period, aims to achieve a 25 percent reduction in HIV prevalence among Nigerians between the ages of 15 and 24. This is a major development that should have been given prominent attention by the publications instead of being tucked in inside pages.

*The Comet* of September 20 and *Post Express* of September 19 however had two HIV/AIDS - related stories, **Nigeria, Fourth In HIV/AIDS Infection** and **50,000 HIV/AIDS Victims In Anambra** respectively on their back pages. *The Nigeria Tribune* also had a story titled: **HIV Patients Rape Virgins To Get Cured – Governor** in its September 13 edition.

The three indicate that newspapers still prefer playing up the negative aspects of HIV/AIDS, instead of giving equal prominence to events like the agreement earlier mentioned.

A noticeable improvement this month was that **30** pictures were published to illustrate many HIV/AIDS reports. Before now, newspapers lacked appropriate pictures to accompany stories or illustrate the points being made.

Apart from the *Sunday Punch*, which regularly publishes HIV/AIDS cartoons on its back page, *Thisday* and *Tribune* this month had one cartoon each in support of the HIV/AIDS campaign. *The Tribune* copy, *Here and There*, by Tope Ogundijo illustrated the case of someone who gets infected by the virus by having sexual relationship with many ladies.

He was made to realize the danger of infecting his daughter in the event that “one of his victims is a girlfriend to a boy who happens to be having an affair with his daughter”. “Everybody, including your daughter, could contract HIV except they don’t have sexual relationship”, the doctor told the man.

One of the major developments in the HIV/AIDS circle late in July was the appointment of Professor Babatunde Osotimehin as the new head of the National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA) to replace Professor Iboronke Akinsete.

Most of the newspapers have done well in getting the new NACA chairman to speak on his priorities. *The Guardian*, *Champion*, *Punch* and *Thisday* all published interviews with Professor Osotimehin in September. Osotimehin assured that his mission was to build on what was in existence to ensure that all Nigerians become aware of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. He also pledged to take the crusade to unreached communities.

From the coverage given to the new NACA chairman, the newspapers appear very willing to cooperate with the agency to curtail the spread of HIV. NACA will do well to sustain their interest, especially those of health correspondents through regular briefings on its activities and plans.

Like in previous months, newspapers in September had high quality and incisive newsfeature on the virus. For example, *Thisday* in its September 1 edition, had a two-page report, a continuation from the last week in July, : **Living With The Virus**. The report examined all aspects of HIV, highlighting cases of those who have been living with the virus, preventive measures, care for infected persons and global efforts to get a cure. The report was appropriately illustrated with the picture of Dr. Matemilola, a medical doctor living with HIV

Other major features in the month include a full-page article titled: **HIV/AIDS Management: The Search For Improved Facilities** published in *Sunday Punch* of September 29; **YEF: Breaking The Silence On HIV/AIDS** in *Daily*

*Times* of September 14 and **AIDS – Deceiving Victims With Benign Cures** in Sunday *Vanguard* of September 8.

*Vanguard* particularly deserves commendation for the series on its weekly health page titled: **20 Questions Most Asked About HIV/AIDS**. The series provides answers for questions usually agitating the minds of many about HIV. To ensure that all possible questions are answered, it is suggested that readers should be encouraged to send in questions to which answers would be provided.

September also had a number of reports on faith-based approach to curbing HIV/AIDS, which need to be encouraged. *The Post Express* of September 25 published a two-page report titled: **Church, AIDS And Stigma** while *The Comet* of September 15 had a quarter page report titled: **God Against AIDS**. While the *Post Express* report is the culled story of a conference in November 2001 by a group of African Church leaders in Nairobi, *the Comet's* piece was on the activities of the Redeemed AIDS Programme Action Committee (RAPAC). Both reports highlighted the expected role of the church in combating the disease against the background of their large followership.

To gear Nigerian churches into action, there is need for more comprehensive reports on their HIV/AIDS - related activities.

One of the criticisms of the HIV/AIDS news reports in August was lack of follow-up reports on some controversial HIV/AIDS issue. The case of the two-year-old girl who was expelled from her school following her mother's disclosure that she (the mother) was living with HIV, was reported by only *the Anchor* newspaper. No other paper mentioned it or drew attention to the discrimination against the baby.

*The Guardian* of Friday, September 20 had a good example from South Africa of the kind of response that should have followed the child's expulsion. In the report titled: **South African Lawyer Challenges School's Rejection Of HIV Child**, *The Guardian* reported that lawyer for a South African mother whose HIV- positive toddler was rejected by a school, lashed out at the institution for prejudice and ignorance.

The mother of the rejected baby, in a civil action in the Johannesburg High Court, insisted that her child was discriminated against by the nursery school.

Even though the mother of the expelled Nigerian child has not resorted to legal action, the media could have interviewed lawyers, human rights and HIV activists and publish reactions to draw attention to the child's plight.

While the South African media has succeeded in turning a local matter into an international news item, a similar situation did not even attract enough attention here. Seven months into the monitoring, use of inappropriate language persists

although there is a noticeable improvement with the increased use of *People Living With HIV/AIDS* (PLWHA) instead of *HIV/AIDS Victims*.

The word **scourge** however recurs in headlines like the report in the *Comet* of September 26, titled “**Theatre Against A Scourge**.” *Daily Times* of September 9 also had a story titled: “**4m People Infected With Killer Disease In Six States**.”

Journalists interviewed on the use of words like **scourge** and **killer disease** insist that much as they do not want to inflame passion, the nature of the virus demands that the strongest words possible be used to drive home the message without leaving anybody in doubt about the danger it constitutes.

*“For a disease that has no cure yet, and is ravaging many worldwide, we will be begging the issue by looking for alternate names to call it,”* Tunde Abatan, a Lagos journalist maintained.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

Newspapers Monitored – 9

Total Reports – 136

Thisday – 23; The coming 19; Daily Times – 1;

Daily Champion – 8, national Interest – nil; Post Express – 12; Anchor-nil;

Nigerian Tribune – 15, Vanguard – 11; The Punch – 16; Guardian – 13

News Reports – 107

Newsfeatures – 22

Opinion Articles – 7

Photographs – 30

Cartoons -

## **MATHEMATICIANS AND HIV/AIDS (OCTOBER 2002)**

What has the search for cure for HIV/AIDS got to do with mathematics? This is the question that is likely to agitate the mind of many readers of *The Guardian* with the headline of a major piece titled “**Seeking Mathematical Solutions To HIV/AIDS, Sickle Cell Problems**” on the newspapers education page of October 17.

On October 19, *The Guardian* also had another two-page report on the same issue titled “**Mathematics As Weapon Against HIV/AIDS**” on its health pages.

These two reports, which form the highpoint of print media coverage of HIV/AIDS issues in October, are about some Nigerian scientists under the umbrella of the National Mathematics Centre, who are creating models for healing PLWHA, using geometric and algebraic formulae to decode the mystery surrounding the pandemic.

“Biological laws obey mathematical expressions, which are derived from modeling. Mathematicians have the skill with which to put some of the phenomena into concise mathematical expression which, with the knowledge of the disease, can apply in real life experiences and the disease conditions”, *The Guardian* quoted Dr. Jonathan Ogidi, the centre’s consultant on tropical diseases as saying.

For a disease which has defied cure, it is good news that there is hope for a solution through unexpected quarters like mathematics. *The Guardian* was the only one that provided a comprehensive insight to the mathematical approach into finding a cure for HIV/ AIDS.

Being an unconventional approach the newspapers should have been interested in publishing extensive follow-up reports on it, but unlike the generous space usually given to alternative medical practitioners who claim to have a cure for AIDS, an important development like a possible mathematical solution to HIV/AIDS did not get their attention.

The HIV/AIDS mathematics reports were two of the total 140 reports in the nine newspapers monitored in October, an increase from the 136 recorded in September.

Like in some previous months, *Post Express* topped others with 23 reports, followed by *Vanguard*, 19 and *The Guardian* 18. Daily Times and Thisday were bottom of the chart with 12 stories each.

Breakdown of the 140 reports showed that 108 were news items, 27 newsfeatures and 5 opinion articles.

The quality of stories was generally good as the newspapers had reader-friendly news and newsfeatures which can help draw attention to the threat the virus constitutes to citizens.

In *Thisday* of October 6, IN A NUTSHELL column has a full-page newsfeature titled **“AIDS.... Make Una Listen o”**. For any doubting Thomas, the columnist ended his piece, which focused on the story of an HIV patient, with a warning in pidgin English, “AIDS is real !!!. Those who have ears, make Una listen o!”

*The Champion* of Wednesday, October 23 also had a full-page report titled: **“Forces Uniting against AIDS”**. Adeze Ojukwu, the writer, examines the collective approach spearheaded by the United Nations (UN) system to halt the spread of the pandemic.

**“Hope for HIV pregnant mothers”** published on October 2 in *The Punch* was another good public enlightenment piece published in the month under review. The full-page article highlights how unborn babies can be protected against the virus.

In response to appeals for private sector involvement in the HIV/AIDS campaign, the CocaCola Africa Foundation in September signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The signing of the memorandum received widecoverage by the media, with virtually all the newspapers monitored publishing the agreement, which involves the bottling company deploying in 100 sales depots, 2000 vehicles and 250,000 dealers for an HIV/AIDS campaign.

Curiously, all the papers relied on the press statement by Coca-Cola to report the signing. While *The Guardian* and *The Comet* rewrote some parts of the Coca-Cola press release, *Thisday* and *Punch* ran the text of the company’s statement. For what was supposed to be a public event, it is not good enough that the publications could not publish independent reports weeks after the event.

Having published a half-page interview with the Public Affairs Director of the company, Mr. Laolu Akinkugbe, much earlier on October 2, *The Guardian* and other newspapers need not have published Coca Cola’s statement, which gave a false impression that the signing of the MOU was done recently.

Perhaps what the newspapers did not realize was that Coca-Cola’s press statement was to pre-empt a planned protest by activists worldwide on October 17 to kick against the company’s non-implementation of comprehensive workplace HIV/AIDS policy, which include treatment and care of infected workers and their dependents.

Much as corporate organizations deserve encouragement for their support for the HIV/AIDS campaign, the media has to be alert and monitor whatever pledges they make.

To help demystify HIV/AIDS, newspapers have recently been illustrating some reports with photographs of some PLWHAs. Akarigbo however protested through his lawyer, maintaining that though he tested positive in 1997, he had since been healed at the Synagogue Church of All Nations.

The lesson from this is the need for newspapers to recognize the right of PLWHAs over their pictures, especially because of the stigma associated with HIV in the country.

Use of inappropriate language still occurs once in a while, eight months into the monitoring. While use of such words could be pardoned within a report, it is deplorable in headlines.

On October 6, *Sunday Champion* conducted a public opinion poll on the desirability of having HIV test before marriage. Unfortunately, the bold headline was “**HIV/AIDS test**”. Of course there is no “AIDS test”, only “HIV test”.

Instances like the above justify the need for workshops and seminars on reporting HIV/AIDS to be extended to non-health reporters. This particular wrong headline was on the women’s page, which regularly highlights issues bordering on male and female relationships.

The newspapers have a wide coverage of HIV/AIDS issues and developments. Increasingly, there is a noticeable improvement in the quality of coverage beyond research reports and government pronouncements.

Non-governmental organizations working in the field like Human Support Services, Youth Empowerment Foundation (YEF), Centre for Right to Health (CHR) and even religious organizations now get generous coverage for their activities in the campaign against HIV/AIDS. This is a good development, as it will encourage the groups to do more and catch the attention of the public on the issues being promoted.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

COMET	=	14
CHAMPION	=	15
DAILY TIMES	=	12
POST EXPRESS	=	23
TRIBUNE	=	13
VANGUARD	=	19

PUNCH	=	14
THISDAY	=	12
GUARDIAN	=	18
<b>TOTAL REPORTS</b>	=	<b>140</b>
<b><u>BREAKDOWN:</u></b>		
NEWS	=	108
NEWSFEATURES	=	21
LETTERS TO EDITOR	=	3
OPINION ARTICLES	=	5
INTERVIEWS	=	3
<b><u>TOTAL PHOTOS USED:</u></b>	=	<b>39</b>
<b><u>TOTAL CARTOON:</u></b>	=	<b>2 (PUNCH ON SATURDAY BOTTOM STRIP)</b>
<b><u>HEADLINE:</u></b>	=	<b>2 INAPPROPRIATE STORIES</b>
<b><u>QUALITY:</u></b>	=	<b>4 FAIR REPORTS</b>

## **HIV IN SCHOOLS AND WORKPLACES (NOVEMBER 2002)**

One fact that has been stressed in the campaign against the spread of HIV is that it is more than a health issue. It is an issue that affects all.

AIDS activists have always observed that virtually all sectors of human endeavour would be threatened unless the alarming spread of the virus is curbed.

Newspaper coverage for November indicated that HIV is being taken seriously by various professionals outside the health sector.

The nine newspapers monitored published reports of HIV/AIDS as it affects education, aviation, transportation, business and even sports.

Education particularly got significant attention as some publications had stories and editorial on the spread of HIV in Nigerian universities.

*The Vanguard* of November 21 had almost a full-page report titled “**AIDS Scourge Ravages Varsities.**” The report, based on a presentation by the former senior special assistant to the President on HIV/AIDS, Professor Ibrinke Akinsete, aptly captured the grim situation on the campuses.

“The disease is devastating our university population,” Professor Akinsete stated in the lecture to mark the African University Day. Although the *Vanguard* report fell short on appropriate use of language with the use of words like “scourge,” “killer ailment” and “dreaded disease”, it is commendable that a substantial part of Akinsete’s paper was reproduced by the newspaper with appropriate graphs and pictures to illustrate the danger posed by the virus to education.

The other HIV/AIDS education - related reports during the month were published on the front page of *The Nigerian Tribune* of November 16 titled “**6% University of Ibadan male undergraduates have HIV – Experts**” and in the *Vanguard* of November 26, an editorial titled “**Undergraduates and AIDS scourge**”.

The *Vanguard* editorial was like a swift response to the *Tribune* report. While the *Tribune* should be commended for giving the HIV/AIDS report front-page attention, *Vanguard* displayed a very high sense of responsibility by quickly writing an editorial on the alarming report.

“To prevent a total ruination of a generation of the nation’s future leaders to the AIDS scourge, there is need for a positive government policy to minimize and discourage the promiscuous attitude of Nigerians”, *Vanguard* stated.

Newspapers should once in a while write editorials on the epidemic so as to induce the relevant authorities to act.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on aviation was highlighted in the *Tribune* on November 6 with a half page report on page 17.

According to the report, “manifestation of HIV infection related to the nervous system, mental ability of the individual, oxygen carrying capacity of the blood and the effects of medication might have impact on aviation safety”.

Regarding sports, the Daily Times on Saturday of November 16, page 30 had a well-illustrated full page culled report titled, “**AIDS And Football: Caution Yes, But Not Panic**”.

In the report culled from *FIFA* magazine, James Sekajugo, a member of the medical commission of the Confederation of African Football (CAF), a FIFA instructor, provided answers to question on the possibility of transmission of the virus during football matches, and what players, coaches and officials should beware of.

Noting that the excitement of soccer and attendant emotional reactions associated with it create avenues for high risk behaviour, which may include the excessive consumption of alcohol and unprotected sex, Sekajugo called for more research to compile specific data on AIDS and football.

Other articles on how HIV relates to other sectors include a story in the *Champion* of March 22, on page 4 titled “**Involving Truckers In Fight Against HIV**”, and “**Oil Chiefs To Fight HIV/AIDS**” in *Sunday Comet* of November 24.

Generally, November publications had extensive features on HIV/AIDS, which indicates an increasing interest of the print media in reporting on the disease. *The Guardian* of November 9 and *Champion* of November 27 had two very commendable newsfeatures about people living with HIV/AIDS and how to live positively with HIV.

*The Guardian* had two page report titled, “**The Future Is Bright, Says Couple Who Live With HIV**”. The focus was on Mohammed and Lucy Auwah who tested positive in 1998. After overcoming the shock *Mohammed and Lucy* had a testimony of a newfound world and a healthy baby, Isaac. Pictures of the child, parents, stakeholders and friends were lavishly used in the items.

Olayinka Jegede Ekpo, Executive Director of Nigerian Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS was the focus of the *Champion* story titled “**There is Hope For People Living With HIV/AIDS**”.

The two will help in the campaign against stigmatization of PLWHAs. The press should however intensify efforts to interview other PLWHAs willing to be featured, especially outside Lagos.

The reports mentioned above were part of the 158 HIV/AIDS reports published in November. The figure indicates an increase over the 140 published in October. Three papers, *the Guardian*, *Post Express*, and *Champion* tied ahead of others with 25 reports each. Comet had 18, Punch 15, Daily Times 14, Thisday 12 and *Tribune* 11.

In the month under review, the role of religion in helping to check the spread of the virus was one major issue that got the attention of the newspapers. This was due to the launching of a non-governmental organisation – Inter faith HIV/AIDS Council of Nigeria by Christian and Muslim leaders.

The NGO was founded with the Balm in Gilead, an African- American NGO in the United States of America.

Virtually all the papers had reports on the launching held on November 19,2002. *Thisday* November 20, had a story titled “**HIV/AIDS: Religious leaders unite Against HIV/AIDS**” with a picture of the launching.

The Punch of November 22 had a story titled “**Religious Leaders form Alliance on HIV/AIDS**” and *Post Express* – “**Inter Faith HIV/AIDS Council of Nigeria formed**”.

The Guardian and Thisday had full-page newsfeatures. On November 20, The Guardian published an article titled “**Religion, A Saving Approach To AIDS Pandemic**” while Thisday of November had “**A Woman’s war**” focusing on the founder/president of Balm in Gilead, Pernessa Scale.

The attention given to the launching of the Inter-Faith HIV/AIDS Council will definitely go a long way in awakening the religious community to its role in combating the pandemic.

Considering that corporate organisations have always been urged to support the campaign against HIV/AIDS, the decision of the Nigeria Bottling Company (NBC) to spend N400m per annum on this cause is commendable.

However, it is possible the newspapers over-reported the NBC commitment and the company could be accused of getting attention for voting an amount comparably smaller to what other organisations have been spending on the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign.

Last month, newspapers had generously published reports of CocaCola Foundation (MOU) with UNICEF to propagate the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign. This month, The Punch had two reports on the NBC HIV/AIDS N400m budget, *Champion* had two reports and *the Guardian* one.

Apart from Punch's front-page report of November 13 titled "**75 NBC Plc Staff Test Positive For HIV/AIDS**", other reports focused on the budget.

However, while the NBC got lavish coverage for its efforts, the newspapers failed to spotlight the public hearing on the House of Representatives Bill to establish the National Agency for Prevention and Control of AIDS, Tuberculosis and other Related Diseases.

Only the Vanguard in its November 20 edition reported the Assembly hearing of November 19 in a story titled "**Ghali Na'Abba Promises Action On HIV/AIDS**". The hearing at the National Assembly is an important aspect of the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign.

Without enabling legislation, the HIV/AIDS campaign will lack the force it requires. Newspapers will do well to keep legislative matters on HIV/AIDS in the news to help hasten the long process.

*The Comet* however made up for the lapse in the press coverage of legislative efforts in support of the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign with a front-page photograph of President Olusegun Obasanjo signing the National Assembly banner on the campaign shortly after the presentation of the 2003 budget to the legislature.

Even without an accompanying story, the colour picture is a very positive way of keeping HIV/AIDS related reports on front pages of newspapers.

Another report on page one of *The Guardian* of Monday, November 4 titled "**Nigerian Scientist, Bababunmi, Gets U.S. Patent On AIDS Drug**" is another positive cover page report on HIV/AIDS in November.

In the story, the *Guardian* reported that Professor Enitan Bababunmi has been granted a patent by the United States government for combining three chemical compounds to produce a potent formulation that could prevent skeletal muscle degeneration, also known as "wasting" in AIDS and cancer patients.

This report is very detailed with every possible angle on Professor Bababunmi in the story. *The Guardian* reports that "although Bababunmi's formulation will not cure AIDS or cancer, it has the ability to arrest excessive loss of body weight or wasting and stabilize patients to live longer than they would have without it".

*The Guardian* story is a good example of how not to sensationalize or trivialize progress being recorded in managing the effects of the virus, while efforts continue at finding a cure.

While there is a noticeable improvement in the use of appropriate pictures to illustrate HIV/AIDS stories, there is need for more cartoons. Apart from the

Punch on Sunday which continues to run a regular strip on its back page, only Vanguard out of the eight other papers had one cartoon for the whole month.

With all the papers running daily cartoons, it would not be too much to ask if cartoonists regularly draw attention to HIV/AIDS issues.

Generally, November monitoring reveals an improvement in the quality of HIV/AIDS coverage. Perhaps, one could add that various seminars, workshops and lectures targeted at improving media coverage of HIV/AIDS are evidently yielding results with the multi-sectoral coverage noticed this month.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

COMET	18
CHAMPION	25
DAILY TIMES	14
POST EXPRESS	25
TRIBUNE	11
VANGUARD	13
PUNCH	15
THISDAY	12
GUARDIAN	25

### **BREAKDOWN OF COVERAGE**

NEWS	122	
EDITORIAL	1	
FEATURES	24	
COMMENTARY/OPINION		6
LETTERS	2	
INTERVIEWS	3	
PHOTOGRAPHS	34	
CARTOON	1	(VANGUARD NOV. 3) PUNCH
HEADLINE	10	(INAPPROPRIATE HEADLINES)
SPACE	28 <sup>1/2</sup>	FULL PAGES

### **BREAKDOWN OF FULL PAGES PER PAPER**

POST EXPRESS	6 <sup>1/2</sup> PAGES
TRIBUNE	4 PAGES
GUARDIAN	4 PAGES
DAILY TIMES	4 PAGES
COMET	3 PAGES
THISDAY	2 <sup>1/2</sup> PAGES
PUNCH	2 PAGES
CHAMPION	1 <sup>1/2</sup> PAGES

VANGUARD

1 PAGE

**FOCUS OF COVERAGE**

AWARENESS/PREVENTION	105
TREATMENT/CARE	10
ADVOCACY/CAMPAIGN	43
TOTAL	

**QUALITY OF COVERAGE**

GOOD	147
FAIR	11

**SOURCES OF REPORTS**

AGENCY REPORTS (INTERNET, AFP, PRESS RELEASE)	16
ORIGINAL REPORTS	142

## **EVENTS OF WORLD AIDS DAY (DECEMBER 2002)**

In the past when designated days are marked worldwide in support of any cause, the Nigerian media usually manage to highlight the events on or before the day and then promptly forget about it.

There seems to be a departure from this trend judging from the December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2002 World AIDS Day celebration. Published reports about activities marking the day lasted through the month.

A total of 77 items, including reports, pictures and comments were published on the World AIDS Day events – rallies, workshops, seminars, and walks among others.

Apart from news mention on activities marking the day, like government pronouncements, road walk, broadcast by President Olusegun Obasanjo and HIV/AIDS activities, the monitored newspapers published incisive articles on the theme of the campaign “**Live And Let’s Live**” addressing stigma and discrimination.

Some of the outstanding newsfeatures published during the event included, a two-page report in *Thisday* of December 2, 2002 titled “HIV/AIDS: It’s a matter of stigma,” which is an account of deliberations by HIV/AIDS stakeholders and the media at an interactive session.

Similar publications include, “Three decades of HIV/AIDS scourge: No success story to tell”, Daily Times of December 2, “HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination” in Daily Champion of December 18 and “World AIDS Day removing stigma out of HIV/AIDS” in Post Express of December 4, 2002. Expectedly, the World AIDS Day events attracted front and back page attention in Daily Times, *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Post Express* and *The Guardian*. The colourful picture of the great walk of 2002 and people living with HIV/AIDS and President Obasanjo attracted wide publication on cover and inside pages of all the newspapers.

The lesson from the wide use of the picture is that HIV/AIDS activists have to consciously organize events that can attract the media to their cause.

Three newspapers, *Daily Champion*, *Daily Times* and *Nigerian Tribune* published editorials to mark the World AIDS Day. In their editorials titled “AIDS: A scourge and its Stigma” and “AIDS Stigma” by *Daily Times* and *Champion* respectively, they called for attitudinal change towards people living with the virus.

*Tribune* in two separate editorials, titled “Stigmatization of AIDS Patients” and “Children Living With HIV/AIDS” also urged the public to treat PLWHAs with dignity.

“We are hopeful that beyond December 1, countries and NGOs that are into HIV/AIDS spread control will continue to emphasize the need for the non-infected to accept and accord all assistance to the infected sufferers”, Daily Champion stated in its editorial of December 20.

Unfortunately, one major event during the celebration, which did not attract much publicity was a rally organised by PLWHAs under the auspices of AIDS Alliance Nigeria (AAN) on December 7.

Only *The Comet* in its December edition published pictures and report about the rally. The event was one rare opportunity to educate the public on how to live positively with HIV, thus correcting the impression that HIV/AIDS is a death sentence with no hope for infected persons.

PLWHAs have been accused of not being open about their status. The rally would have given the media opportunity to get pictures of other PLWHAs than the few activists whose pictures have been over-used in the media.

Like in past World AIDS Day celebrations, papers were filled with stories on policy statements like provision of job opportunities for PLWHAs, etc. The December 2002 anniversary was an opportunity to examine to what extent the government has fulfilled its past promises. Not much of this investigative approach was evident in the December 2002 reports.

To prevent the annual celebration from becoming another ritual, the media must make the government accountable for its HIV/AIDS policies.

Ironically, while the newspapers through their reports were trying to support the HIV/AIDS campaign against stigmatization, the words used in many of the reports were the type activists have always complained about.

Words like “**HIV carriers**”, “**HIV/AIDS victims**”, “**AIDS scourge**” have over the years stigmatized PLWHAs and sustained myths about the virus. Unfortunately the World AIDS Day reports were replete with these disempowering words. If the anti-stigma campaign must be won, the media has to accept that these words are not helpful to the campaign and should be left out of reports.

Apart from the World AIDS Day reports, the 10 papers monitored in December had other HIV/AIDS publications. The 77 World AIDS Day reports were part of the total 200 HIV/AIDS items published in the month under review.

A breakdown of the publications showed that Champion with 32 reports topped the list. Daily Times 26, Vanguard 25, Comet 22 and Thisday 21.

The Punch and Tribune published 18 items each. The Guardian 17, Post Express 16 and Daily Independent 5.

Other major reports that attracted media attention during the month included the United Nations International Children Fund (UNICEF) report, which stated that Nigeria has the highest number of children with HIV. The report was a cover page story in the Nigerian Tribune of December 16.

*The Vanguard* of December 9,2002 reported on its front page that the first phase of an African virus vaccine trial is to be conducted in selected African countries.

*The Guardian* of December 16 had a back page report titled ‘Clinton’s HIV/AIDS Hospital Coming’. The story is about the proposed establishment of the first hospital for HIV/AIDS in the country.

The highlighted stories are an indication of the variety of stories available for publication by the newspapers. Depending on what a newspaper decides to emphasize-either a negative or positive slant - there is always an HIV/AIDS story that can be given prominence.

For a year that started with a lot of promise, the outcome of the December monitoring is an indication that the media can actively support the HIV/AIDS campaigns of various stakeholders if they work out appropriate strategies to get the media on their side.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

NEWSPAPERS MONITORED 10

(1)	CHAMPION	32
(2)	DAILY TIMES	26
(3)	VANGUARD	25
(4)	COMET	22
(5)	THISDAY	21
(6)	PUNCH	18
(7)	TRIBUNE	18
(8)	GUARDIAN	17
(9)	POST EXPRESS	16

(10) DAILY INDEPENDENT 5

**TOTAL REPORTS** 200

### **BREAKDOWN**

NEWS	165
NEWSFEATURES	19

OPINION ARTICLES	7	
LETTERS TO EDITOR	3	
INTERVIEWS	2	
EDITORIALS		4
PHOTOGRAPHS	35	

**HEADLINE ASSESSMENT**

9 inappropriate headlines used.

**FOCUS**

Awareness was most prominent in December.

**SOURCES**

14 stories were sourced from news agencies.

**SPACE**

201/2 full pages and 1,408 paragraphs were allotted to the reports in December.

## **AMERICA'S \$60M AFRICAN AIDS FUND (JANUARY 2003)**

In reporting HIV/AIDS, there is the need to reflect it not just as a health issue but also a developmental issue. This is because virtually every sector of the society is threatened by the epidemic.

Newspapers monitored in January seem to have subscribed to this fact and responding by doing HIV/AIDS reports in different sections of their publications. However, some reports in non-health pages usually fall short of minimum standards for HIV/AIDS reporting.

*The Sunday Vanguard* on its sports page of January 26 carried a report titled "Is Westerhof HIV positive?" This story clearly shows how journalists who might not be knowledgeable about the true nature of the disease could spread misconceptions.

In typical sports reporting, the report is guilty of sensationalisation of a serious issue, which is capable of stigmatizing the football coach. Although the headline of the report with a question mark suggests that the writer was trying to provide some fresh perspective to the controversy ignited by Westerhof's estranged wife, it turned out to be a rehash of the earlier report in *the Standard* of South Africa. No new fact was contained in the report to deserve the prominence given to it in the special section of the newspaper.

The report also included some wild claims like the assertion that the child expected by Westerhof's estranged wife would be HIV positive. "The disaster is she is expecting the couple's child anytime from now. The child will surely have been infected!"

With latest developments in the treatment of HIV-positive persons, the child of a positive couple has over 80 percent chance of not getting infected.

To avoid misrepresentations like this, it is suggested that more training should be extended to non-health reporters who, once in a while, have to write about HIV/AIDS on their beats.

The Westerhof report was one of the **101** HIV/AIDS related reports in the ten newspapers monitored. Compared to the previous three months, the number was rather low. December had **165** reports, November **122** and October **108**. For four days in January, all the papers had no HIV/AIDS reports; perhaps because of the beginning of the New Year, no major HIV/AIDS event was held in January.

During the month, *Post Express* had the highest number of reports with **22**, followed by *Daily Times* - 13 and *Tribune* - 11.

*Punch* had **10**, *Thisday* and *Guardian* - 9 each, *Daily Independent* and *Champion* - eight each, *Comet* - six and *Vanguard* five.

Despite the low number of reports, many outstanding newsfeatures were published in January. Among these were a full page report on the *Punch Appointments* page of January 8 titled “**Tackling AIDS Scourge in the work place**”, “**fighting AIDS Scourge in the military**” in *Thisday* of January 8 and another two full pages titled “**Is HIV/AIDS Still a Health Issue?**” in *Thisday* of January 12.

*The Punch* of January 15 also had a good newsfeature titled “**Concern over IP Bill and Access to Drugs**” while *The Comet* on Saturday, January 18 published a three-page profile titled “**One peculiar passion for life**” on the Executive Director of Centre to Right to Health (CRH), Stella Iwuagwu.

The newspapers have developed sufficient interest in supporting the HIV/AIDS campaign as demonstrated by the quality of newsfeatures capable of enlightening the public on the various perspectives to the crusade against the spread of the virus. The newspapers can however still do more in providing analysis, especially on international policies on HIV/AIDS. It is necessary to critically evaluate the policies to determine how sufficient and effective they can be to halt the spread of the virus.

*The Champion* did well in its January 19 edition to devote a full page to the recent American government initiative for Africa, which involves allowing Africa and other developing countries gain access to pharmaceuticals and HIV/AIDS test kits.

Unfortunately the report was just a full reproduction of the American government’s statement without any analysis of past policies against the background of the present situation in Nigeria or other developing countries. This is another disturbing trend that sometimes suggest that some newspapers may just be filling their pages with foreign HIV/AIDS articles. Many don’t even credit sources of the published reports.

*The Post Express* of January 8 had a report titled “**HIV infection and AIDS**” without byline or source. *The Daily Times* of January 16 story titled “**Travails Of A Man With Killer Disease**” also had no source.

Basic journalism rule demands that reports must have bylines and sources credited, especially when they are culled.

Unlike past months when there are usually at least one editorial by one of the newspapers, none had any editorial in January while only *Nigerian Tribune* had a front page HIV/AIDS story.

The front-page story was the US \$60m allocation to combat AIDS in Africa. This particular allocation should have necessitated an editorial by some of the newspapers. Such editorial could have called for proper utilization of previous funds and grants.

While there is sustained improvement in the use of photographs to illustrate HIV/AIDS stories, there was no HIV/AIDS related cartoon in January, except in the *Sunday Punch*, which runs a regular HIV/AIDS cartoon strip. Apart from *the Punch*, more cartoonists should be encouraged by media-based stakeholders to give attention to HIV/AIDS.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

NEWSPAPERS MONITORED	10		
1. POST EXPRESS	=	22	
2. DAILY TIMES	=	13	
3. TRIBUNE	=	11	
4. PUNCH	=	10	
5. THISDAY	=	9	
6. GUARDIAN	=	9	
7. DAILY INDEPENDENT	=	8	
8. CHAMPION	=	8	
9. COMET	=	6	
10. VANGUARD	=	5	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>101</b>	

### **BREAK DOWN**

NEWS	=	65
NEWSFEATURES	=	27
OPINION ARTICLES	=	6
POEM	=	1
INTERVIEWS	=	1
LETTER	=	1
PHOTOGRAPHS	=	31

### **HEADLINES**

There were three inappropriate headlines used this month in THISDAY, (Jan 8,) Punch Jan (19,) and CHAMPION (Jan. 22.)

### **SPACE**

A total of 27 full pages were allotted to the coverage of HIV/AIDS this month by all the newspapers.

**FOCUS**

The focus of coverage was **Enlightenment** and **Prevention**.

**QUALITY OF COVERAGE**

A total of 6 reports were adjudged fair either because of wrong words in the headlines or because of their contents.

**SOURCE**

Five reports were discovered to be news agency derived or from bulletins or culled reports, while others were originally sourced from events.

## **HIV VACCINE CONFERENCE (FEBRUARY 2003)**

One major criticism of newspaper coverage of HIV/AIDS issues in the media in the last eleven months is relative absence of editorial comments. Editorials on HIV/AIDS have been few, with only few newspapers considering the issue serious enough for comments, either in support or criticism of some aspects of the campaign.

The highest number of editorials written any month by the eleven papers has been three. The most consistent papers with HIV/AIDS editorial comments are *Vanguard*, *Guardian* and *Tribune*. It is not enough for newspapers to publish stories and features on the epidemic; they need to regularly publish informed editorial comments to keep the issue in national discourse.

February was yet another month when only one editorial was published in all the ten newspapers monitored. As if in response to the observation made in January that President George Bush's new AIDS plan for Africa deserved editorial comment, *The Comet* on February 11 had one, titled *President Bush's AIDS Plan for Africa*.

The well-written editorial indicated that the writer had a good understanding of the issues involved in the HIV/AIDS campaign.

While rightly noting that the "Bush plan has the immediate benefit of re-focusing global energies on the fight against the spread of the virus", the newspaper was also able to articulate fears by stakeholders.

*The Comet* pointed out that the initiative does not incorporate the fight against poverty, while several African countries like Zimbabwe with high prevalence rates were not included in the plan for political reasons.

*The Comet* editorial is the kind of response expected from newspapers to raise advocacy in the HIV/AIDS campaign and draw attention to pertinent issues.

February like January, witnessed a relatively low number of HIV/AIDS stories published compared to past months.

Although the 114 stories recorded in February was slightly higher than the 104 in January, it is much lower than the 165 recorded in December, 122 in November and 159 in August.

Interestingly, February featured some major events in the HIV/AIDS campaign, especially with the launching of the Business Coalition Against HIV/AIDS by President Olusegun Obasanjo. The event expectedly got good coverage. All major newspapers had stories and pictures of the event.

Although the stories did not make the cover pages, *Thisday* and *The Guardian* had the pictures on page one the day after the event was held.

During the month under review, President Obasanjo also got a well-deserved award for his leadership role in the AIDS campaign from the Harvard AIDS Institute. The press statement announcing the award was generously used by the newspapers and the readers were told how much support President Obasanjo unlike some other African leaders, had given the HIV/AIDS campaign.

The award was another opportunity for editorial and opinion writers to evaluate the campaign against the epidemic. It was an opportunity to commend the president for a good job and urge him not to relent. Unfortunately, all that the award got were news mentions.

The award for President Obasanjo was one of the events during the Conference on HIV vaccines for Developing Countries; especially West Africa.

The conference equally got good press coverage with the newspapers reporting the possibility of an AIDS vaccine in the next decade based on joint efforts of Nigerian and US scientists.

The conference enhanced the knowledge of journalists about the science and search for a cure for AIDS as some of them who participated in the deliberation later admitted. This underscores the need for continuous involvement of journalists in the business sessions of HIV/AIDS conferences. Journalists should not only be observers at such conferences, but active participants. Considering the importance of the media in winning the fight against HIV/AIDS, media involvement should always be built into conference programmes.

The need for work-place policy on HIV/AIDS to cater for workers infected with the virus also came under focus in February. Although the reports were based on the proposed launching of work-place policy by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity and efforts by the Nigeria Labour Congress, it is hoped that the media will give more attention to this aspect of the campaign as the spread of the virus has the potential of affecting the national productivity.

In a state like Benue, at this time with the highest prevalence rate in the country, health workers strike could greatly affect care and treatment of HIV - positive persons. This was exactly what happened in the state, when workers of the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Makurdi- the only referral hospital - went on indefinite strike.

The media reported the plight of PLWHAs in the state (Benue) who were missing their monthly dosage of anti-retroviral drugs, although only *Daily Times* and *Post Express* of February 1 and 3 respectively used the release in their inside pages.

*Thisday* was able to elaborate on the situation in an almost full page report on the strike on February 10 titled "Benue Groans Under Health Workers Strike-as

HIV/AIDS victims run out of Anti-Retroviral Drugs (ARV), patients visit herbalists homes.”

Even if the media had not envisaged the effect of the strike on the high population of HIV - positive persons on the state, the statement by the PLWHAs should have been given attention by the media.

Since Benue is one of the states with the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS in the country, the editors should have dispatched reporters from their headquarters (as it is usually done) to the state in view of the seriousness of the matter.

Considering that the media could always plead lack of funds, there is increasing need for an HIV/AIDS information or media agency to exhaustively cover developments like these and supply the reports to the media. Experience has shown that while newspapers may not be able to cover some developments, they would not hesitate to use reliable reports made available to them.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

#### **NEWSPAPERS MONITORED<sup>10</sup>**

1.	POST EXPRESS	17
2.	THISDAY	16
3.	COMET	15
4.	GUARDIAN	12
5.	PUNCH	11
6.	DAILY INDEPENDENT	10
7.	VANGUARD	7
8.	TRIBUNE	6
9.	CHAMPION	5
10.	DAILY TIMES	16
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>114</b>

#### **BREAKDOWN**

TOTAL NEWS		93
NEWSFEATURES	14	
ARTICLES		4
INTERVIEWS		2
LETTERS		1
EDITORIAL		1
TOTAL		26

#### **SPACE**

TOTAL 151/2 PAGES,

**SPACE**

1.	POST EXPRESS	4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> PAGES
2.	COMET	4 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> PAGES
3.	TRIBUNE	2 PAGES
4.	THISDAY	2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> PAGES
5.	VANGUARD	1 PAGE
6.	DAILY TIMES	1 PAGE

**QUALITY OF HEADLINES**

Only 2 inappropriate headlines were discovered in February.

**GENERAL QUALITY OF REPORTS**

There were 3 reports adjudged fair in the month of February based on monitoring guidelines.

**FOCUS**

Enlightenment Campaign takes the lead in February

**MISSED REPORTS**

No missed story recorded

**SOURCE**

Not less than 4 reports were sourced through the news agencies such as AFP or culled from other news media.

## **AIDS DRUGS TRIAL CONTROVERSY (MARCH 2003)**

Kunle Hamilton, the editor of the *Glitterati* pullout in *Thisday* on Saturday obviously meant well in the piece he wrote in his column March 2-8 edition.

On a visit to Makurdi, capital of Benue State, reported to have the highest prevalence HIV/AIDS infection in the country, Hamilton was shocked to find that, like in other major cities, ladies in Makurdi also indulge in *loose dressing*. “It was girls galore and they almost all bulged out their sexiest zones as they showcased generous cleavages, bellies and hips,” he noted.

While Hamilton had reason to be concerned about indecent dressing by Makurdi girls, it is difficult to understand why he titled his article “**Makurdi girls showcase HIV/AIDS**”. The girls might have showcased their bodies but definitely not HIV/AIDS.

This kind of headline amounts to stigmatizing the women in Makurdi who might not necessarily be living with HIV. Hamilton would probably had been right to title his piece “**why HIV/AIDS is on the Increase in Makurdi**” which was the message he was trying to convey.

Although HIV/AIDS is a health issue, illustrating the story with a photograph of the Benue State governor would have been more appropriate for the article instead of that of the Minister of Health. Governor George Akume is the one who needs to take urgent action about the situation in his state, not Professor Nwosu, the then minister.

Hamilton’s article was the 91st report on HIV/AIDS published in March by the ten papers monitored. Though the March total figure is the lowest in four months, the quality of most of the reports was relatively high. Instead of news stories with few paragraphs, March coverage had more newsfeatures, elaborate news reports, opinion articles and enlightening write-ups on the epidemic.

Among the outstanding newsfeatures for March were “**Mounting complaints over Nigerian AIDS drug trial**” in Post Express of Wednesday, March 19, “**Breaking the silence on HIV/AIDS**” in Daily Times of March 28, and “**Face to face with HIV/AIDS**” in March 12 edition of the *Daily Independent*.

The Post Express report was a review of the AIDS drug trial in Nigeria, following a study by the Center for Right to Health (CRH) titled “**Drug Trial in Nigeria**”.

Based on the finding by CRH that there were lots of human rights abuses during the trial of December 2001, during which several people living with HIV/AIDS were used, Robert Obioha in the article outlined various steps for ensuring that trials cater for the interests of PLWHAs.

This is a very good piece, as it would educate PLWHAs on their rights, instead of allowing themselves to be used as guinea pigs for questionable trials. In its report, *Daily Times* provides an elaborate report on the lecture delivered by Professor Ibronke Akinsete of the College of Medicine, University of Lagos, titled “**Breaking the silence on HIV/AIDS: The role of the community**”.

This full-page report is a good example of giving readers details in a major presentation, instead of some few paragraph news stories.

*Daily Independent* in the report “**Face to face with HIV/AIDS**” recounts the story of a PLWHA, Mrs. Rolake Nwagwu and her positive attitude to live despite the realities of HIV. Unlike some stories on PLWHAs that end up stigmatizing them, *Daily Independent* was able to present the report in a non-sensational way that makes the reader understand the challenges of living with the virus and how PLWHAs themselves can play an active role in curbing the spread of the disease.

Generally, the newspapers deserve commendation for increased interest in publishing useful information to help curb the spread of the virus. Virtually all have columns supporting the campaign. *Post Express* runs a weekly column *The AIDS Counselor* by Stella Iwuagwu, *Positive living with HIV/AIDS* in the *Daily Times*. “*You and your health*” in *Tribune*, “*Youths and HIV/AIDS-the basics*” in the *Comet*.

In March, opinion writers showed more interest in the HIV/AIDS campaign. HIV/AIDS - related opinion articles were published.

*Champion* had the only editorial comment for the month in its edition of March 7, titled **HIV/AIDS: Fresh facts**.

Noting the findings by British researchers that poor hygiene, crude medicare and unsanitary conditions are more responsible for the spread of the virus than anything, else especially in Africa, *Champion* called for a refocusing of our emphasis on the sources of the infection scientists have identified in our campaign.

The point highlighted in the *Champion* editorial is important considering that every avenue through which the virus could possibly spread has to be blocked. While the transmission through sex has to be checked, efforts have to be made to provide better health care and hygienic conditions for the citizens.

The yearly Armed Forces HIV/AIDS Week got generous mentions in the newspapers, with the speech by the then Defense Minister General Theophilus Danjuma (retired) being the thrust of the reports. Danjuma spoke of how the combat readiness of Armed Forces is being threatened by HIV/AIDS.

Considering the danger which HIV/AIDS poses to the military, the media would need to step up the coverage of the Armed Forces HIV/AIDS Week beyond the opening ceremonies. The week provides justification to review polices to check the spread of the virus in the armed forces, considering the increasing foreign grants for this purpose.

Use of reports without attribution remains a noticeable trend in March. It is important that reports are attributed to give the readers the benefit of knowing the source and credibility of information. For example, the *Post Express* of March 5 had an article titled “**Good Nutrition: Recipe for positive living**”. *The Comet* of March 11 also published a report titled “**Bush initiative for HIV/AIDS relief could be historic turning point**” without credit to the source.

The articles not credited to sources and published by Post Express and Comet were obviously culled from magazines or newsletters. A line at the end of the publication would be very useful for readers to indicate the reliability of the information.

For March, only the Punch had an HIV/AIDS story on its cover page. The story was titled “**Four new strains of HIV-1 found in Nigeria**” in its March 12 edition. The report is based on research in two communities in Oyo State by scientists from the University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan, and AIDS Prevention Initiative in Nigeria (APIN)

Considering the urgent need to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS in the country, having hit a dangerous 5.8% prevalence, newspapers would need to give special consideration to stories about the virus to attract the attention of their readers.

### HIGHLIGHTS

NEWSPAPERS MONITORED 10

1.	POST EXPRESS	=	14
2.	VANGUARD	=	3
3.	CHAMPION	=	12
4.	THISDAY	=	10
5.	COMET	=	11
6.	PUNCH	=	9
7.	DAILY TIMES	=	8
8.	DAILY INDEPENDENT	=	7
9.	GUARDIAN	=	4
10.	TRIBUNE	=	3

**BREAKDOWN**

NEWS	=	60	
NEWSFEATURES	=	23	
OPINION ARTICLES	=	5	
LETTERS	=	2	
EDITORIAL	=	1	
PHOTOGRAPHS	=	17	
GRAPHICS	=	2	

**MAGAZINE REPORTS – APRIL 2002 – MARCH  
2003**

## **BALM – IN – GILEAD FIGHTS HIV (APRIL 2002)**

Considering the large readership enjoyed by soft-sell magazines or “junk” magazines as some prefer to call them, it would have been a plus for the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign if the publications published stories about the virus.

The magazines - *Fame*, *Encomium*, etc usually publish salacious stories which may unwittingly promote a way of life which the HIV/AIDS campaign discourages.

However, monitoring of these magazines in April showed that the publications virtually had no stories on HIV/AIDS.

The only report published in *Fame* was titled *Mr Kool poised to fight AIDS* in the third week of the month. The story was about a pop musician scheduled to perform at a concert organised by Hope Worldwide at the University of Lagos. The headline of the story is informed by the fact that Mr Kool usually sings anti-AIDS campaign songs.

With the readership of the soft-sell magazines cutting across all strata of the society and their potential for reaching a good percentage of the people who the anti-HIV/AIDS messages are meant for, it will be necessary to get the publications interested in publicising the on the virus.

While they may not ordinarily be interested in attending seminars and workshops, stories of people living with HIV/AIDS would be of interest to them. The magazines however need to be advised against stigmatization of PLWHAs.

The weekly newsmagazines however did better during the month with the publication of timely and enlightening HIV/AIDS stories.

*The News* had three reports, *Tell*, one, while *Newswatch*, *The Insider*, *The Week* had none.

Particularly outstanding is the *Tell* story of April 29 on the visit of the officials of Balm in Gilead, a United States faith-based anti-HIV/AIDS organisation.

The one-page story with the imaginative title-*Church is marching on*, highlights the efforts of the Balm in Gilead to sensitise the church, both in the US and Africa to be involved in the anti-AIDS campaign. The story, published in the religion section of the magazine, makes interesting reading and is a good example of reporting HIV/AIDS, not necessarily as a health issue but an issue that permeates all aspects of human life.

Nigeria-based HIV/AIDS non-governmental organisations may need to take a cue from the Balm-in-Gilead by getting the religious communities in Nigeria interested in the campaign. To do this, publishers of religious publications and

producers of broadcast programmes should be trained on how to appropriately disseminate information about the virus without scaring the people.

While *TELL* appears to give more space to health issues, an average of three pages per edition, it was observed that the interest of the magazine may be advert-driven. The health pages usually carry briefs health details on various health issues but contain advertisements of alternate health practitioners.

It is advisable if the magazine is more circumspect about advertisement to be published to avoid promoting unverifiable claims of drugs curing all diseases including HIV/AIDS.

The report published in *The News* of April 29 titled *HIV pandemic, Check up is the answer*, raises ethical question of the need for news or newsfeatures not be advert-induced. Based on the content of the story and accompanying adverts, it would have been more appropriate to call it an advertorial.

While the story was based on an interview with Mrs Rehab Abdulahi, Deputy Managing Director of Winners Medical Diagnostic and Herbal Centre, the accompanying advert is also that of the center. It would have been better to publish the advertisement on another page or publish it in another edition of the magazine altogether.

Perhaps due to the few stories published, use of wrong language was not common as in newspapers, except in one or two cases like in the headline of *The News* story which had “scourge”.

Considering the events and developments in the HIV/AIDS sector, it is difficult to understand why *Newswatch*, *Insider*, and *The Week* had no stories on the virus. At least, the magazines should have found the visit of the Balm in Gilead officials newsworthy.

## **HIV VERSUS RABIES (MAY 2002)**

One of the criticisms against HIV/AIDS campaigns is that they are being done at the expense of other killer diseases. Critics argue that while other killer diseases like malaria fever have not received enough attention, HIV/AIDS has been “over celebrated.”

In its story of May 6, titled **Rabies kills faster than AIDS**, *The News* attempts a comparison between rabies and AIDS. Rabies was said to kill faster than AIDS. While HIV, according to the report, takes as much as 13 years before manifesting as AIDS, rabies is said to take at most 50 days. While the writer of the story may have a point about how fast rabies kills, there is simply no basis for comparison between the two diseases. The spread of AIDS has attained a world-wide pandemic level while cases of rabies are negligible .

The choice and slant of **The News** story is clearly an attempt to play on the word AIDS to draw attention to the rabies story. Although the doctor drew a parallel between AIDS and rabies, AIDS could have been left out of the headline.

Apart from this story, the magazines in May had three other stories. *The News* in the same edition of May 6 reported visit of the Balm in Gilead officials **AIDS in the church**. **The Week** had two stories, **Condom is Cool** and **Condom is Safe**, while *Tell* published a brief, **Towards an AIDS - free world** on the upcoming XIV International AIDS Conference in Barcelona, Spain

The headline of the second story by *The News*, **AIDS in the church** is apt as it would attract attention. Like *Tell*, which had in April published a similar report the **News** fails to indicate efforts by local faith-based organisations to combat the disease.

A few paragraphs on activities of local faith-based groups would have been appropriate for the report so that the erroneous impression is not created that faith-based efforts are non-existent in the country.

**The Week's** three-page report is on the tour of the Condom Quality Assurance and Test Laboratory under the National AIDS/STD's control programme of the Federal Ministry of health, and a full page interview with the head of the laboratory, Mrs. Matilda John.

Considering the wide coverage given to the visit to the laboratory by magazines and newspapers, it is suggested that similar on-site tours of HIV/AIDS - related projects be conducted occasionally. Visits like this affords journalists the opportunity to clarify doubts they may have about some official claims.

In May, **Tell** only had a seven paragraph report announcing the in Barcelona conference in July, while **Newswatch** and **Insider** had no HIV/AIDS stories at all.

Surprisingly, two major HIV/AIDS - related events, the Red Cross Day with the theme “**reset light**”, and the annual conference of the Nigeria Medical Association which focused on “Challenges of the AIDS Scourge”, did not attract any coverage from all the magazines.

This is a major miss by the magazines as the two events merited some coverage.

## **ORPHANS OF HIV/AIDS (AUGUST 2002 – MARCH 2003)**

With 36 published stories, the five newsmagazines monitored, **The Week**, **Insider**, **Tell**, **The News** and **reset ital** between August 2003 and March 2003 gave a fair coverage of HIV/AIDS.

**Reset ital** magazine topped the list with 16 published items, followed by **ital** (8), **The Week**, (6), **Insider Weekly** (4) and **Newswatch** (2). though most of the articles in *Tell* and *The News* were culled from foreign publications, *The Week* and *Insider Weekly* had better-researched publications with more space devoted to articles.

Compared to other health issues, the five newsmagazines gave more attention to HIV/AIDS; they could however have done better with more regular publications, considering the alarming spread of the pandemic in the country.

While politics, and the economy got sustained and prominent coverage by the magazines, health issues most times got were featured in the Back of the Book section. Health reporters attribute the lack of detailed reports on HIV/AIDS to the time needed to research such stories. Lara Owoeye-Wyse of *The News* explained that unlike the newspapers, magazine writers have to investigate issues before they can be written about. “Our editors easily get tired of routine HIV/AIDS reports. This is why we have to take our time and ensure that there is significant development before we can write on HIV/AIDS. If we are indeed to write the kind of incisive stories expected of us, we have to travel out of our stations and do a lot of research which require time. We risk rehearsing newspaper reports if we don’t take our time”, Owoeye- Wyse said.

She may be right but one noticeable lapse in newsmagazine coverage of HIV/AIDS is that unlike the newspapers, the issue is treated strictly as a health issue which it is no longer the case.

HIV/AIDS reports are confined to health pages in the magazines, a situation, which is bound to limit the number of, reports that can be published about the various dimension of the epidemic.

The good quality of some of the HIV/AIDS reports however deserve commendation.

In its February 17 edition, *The News* published a four-page comprehensive report titled “A Ravaging Monster.” Using available facts and figures, the writer, Lara Owoeye -Wyse paints a graphic picture of the alarming increase of the spread of the virus that could convince any one still doubting how bad the situation really is in the country. “If you are a slow reader and it takes you one minute to read this paragraph, by the time you are through, a Nigerian somewhere would have been

infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), the virus that causes the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome”, Owoeye-Wyse writes in her introductory paragraph. Government response was critically reported with an observation that govt. should make drugs affordable to persons living with HIV.

*The News* report is backed by a full-page interview with a research fellow with the Nigerian Institute of Medical Research, (NIMR), Dr. (Mrs.) Rosemary Audu who spoke on why HIV is spreading in the country.

The use in the report of the photograph of a virtually naked woman captioned, “At the throes of death; a woman ravaged by AIDS” is rather obscene. Even if the magazine wished to shock readers, there are decent, non- stigmatising pictures of infected persons that could have been used. The picture may reinforce several myths and misconceptions about the virus which the media ought to correct.

Also, in its February 10 edition, *TELL* also had a three page report titled “Orphaned by a Virus”. The report presents an often-ignored part of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. While many adults die of AIDS - related illnesses, their children are left behind with no hope.” The world of children whose parents died from complications resulting from AIDS as the *TELL* report observed, “is miserable and their future is uncertain”.

The report is appropriately illustrated with pictures of two kids whose parents died of AIDS - related infections and taken at an event organised by Living Hope Care (LHC), one of the NGOs caring for the orphans. This report underscores the need to care for the orphans.

While those living with the virus should be cared for, those orphaned the disease should be considered in the national policies on HIV/AIDS. While all other magazines did not have reports of proceedings at the 14<sup>th</sup> International AIDS Conference in Barcelona, Spain because they had no correspondents at the global event, *Insider Weekly* whose reporter Kingsley Obom –Egbulem, covered the conference, had a three-page report titled “Africa’s Response to a Pandemic”.

The report focused on the development of a treatment therapy for HIV- infected persons by a coalition of African physicians and traditional healers under the aegis of the Association for the Promotion of Traditional Medicine (PROMETRA). Although wondering how the therapy would fare in scientific trials, the *Insider Weekly* report raises hope that alternative medicine may play a major role in the search for treatment for HI/AIDS.

For Nigerian alternative and traditional healers, the lesson from the PROMETRA experience is that they need to publicise their work at local and international conferences. Making unsubstantiated claims is not good enough.

Unless the traditional medicine practitioners open up, the media should avoid giving them publicity capable of misleading the public.

One of the outstanding reports on HIV/AIDS in *The Week* was “Scourge Tearing Economy”, published in September 2002. It highlights how the economies of African countries are being destroyed by HIV/AIDS.

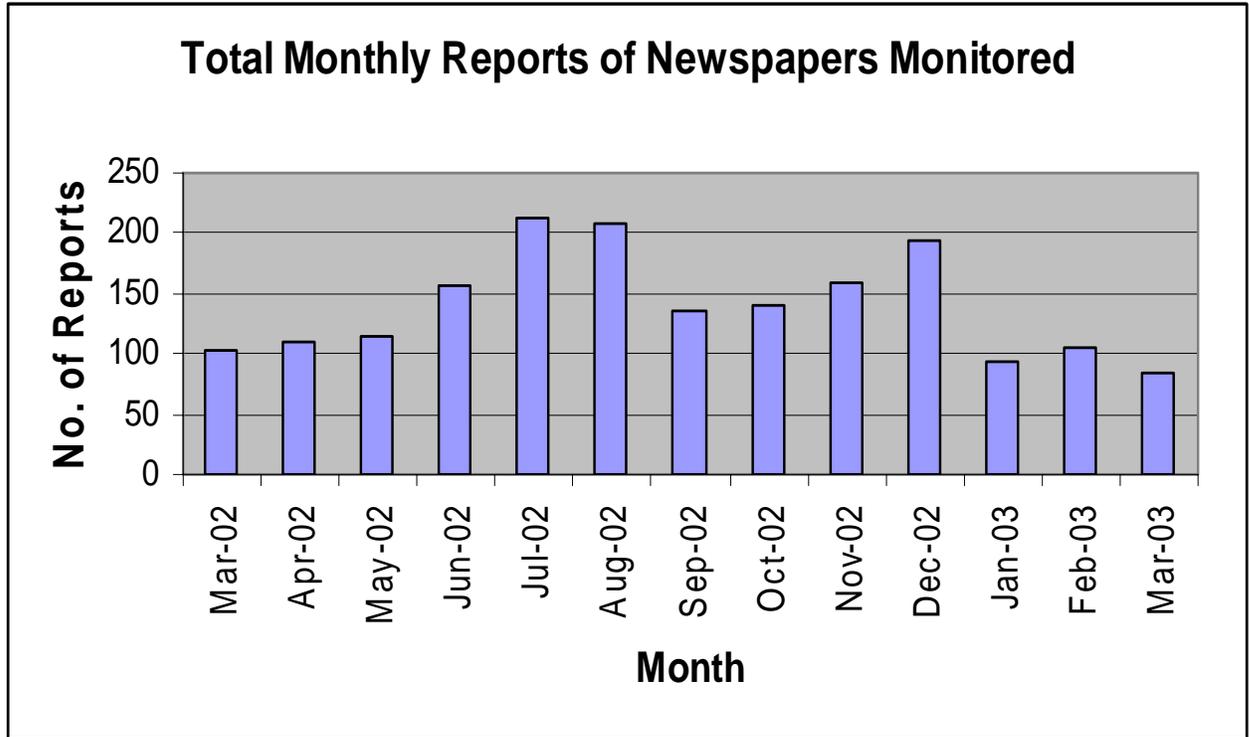
Quoting Era T. Thorone, a research fellow at the Institute of Race and Social Division, Boston University USA, *The Week* reports: “AIDS will define the direction of significant segments of the continent in development, economics and politics. The economies of severely affected countries will suffer as the economically active sector of the population is hardest hit”. Although many African leaders have pledged support for the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign, *The Week* is report showed that concrete steps are not being taken by the leaders. They need to go beyond mere rhetoric if they are to save their national economies from the impact of the epidemic.

It was also observed that while the report had estimates of the effect of the virus on the Kenyan economy, those of other African countries were not included. There is the need for more research on the effects of HIV/AIDS on the various sector of the economies of African countries to enhance the anti-AIDS campaign.

**STATISTICAL TABLES****TABLE 1****MONTHLY REPORTS PUBLISHED (NEWSPAPERS)**  
**MARCH 2002 – MARCH 2003**

<b>NO</b>	<b>NEWSPAPERS</b>	<b>MARCH</b>	<b>APRIL</b>	<b>MAY</b>	<b>JUNE</b>	<b>JULY</b>	<b>AUG.</b>	<b>SEP.</b>
1.	COMET	10	11	15	25	26	34	19
2.	NATIONAL INTEREST	8	7	-	1	5	1	-
3.	DAILY CHAMPION	7	14	8	16	21	20	8
4.	DAILY TIMES	12	11	15	19	18	21	19
5.	POST EXPRESS	15	13	14	15	36	18	12
6.	ANCHOR	6	10	5	8	6	3	-
7.	TRIBUNE	11	6	(9)	11	12	25	15
8.	VANGUARD	6	13	15	10	20	24	11
9.	PUNCH	3	8	15	12	24	26	16
10.	THIS DAY	12	10	5	18	20	19	23
11.	GUARDIAN	12	6	14	21	24	18	13
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>136</b>

<b>NO</b>	<b>OCT.</b>	<b>NOV.</b>	<b>DEC.</b>	<b>JAN.</b>	<b>FEB.</b>	<b>MARCH</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
1.	14	18	22	6	15	11	226
2.	-	-	-	-	-	-	22
3.	15	25	32	8	5	12	191
4.	12	14	26	13	16	8	204
5.	23	25	16	22	17	14	240
6.	-	-	-	-	-	-	38
7.	13	12	18	11	6	3	152
8.	19	12	25	5	7	13	180
9.	14	15	18	10	11	9	181
10.	12	12	21	9	16	10	187
11.	18	25	17	9	12	4	193
	<b>140</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>1814</b>



This table gives a breakdown of total reports published by the newspapers monthly. It also indicates the total reports published by all the papers in the 13 months under review.

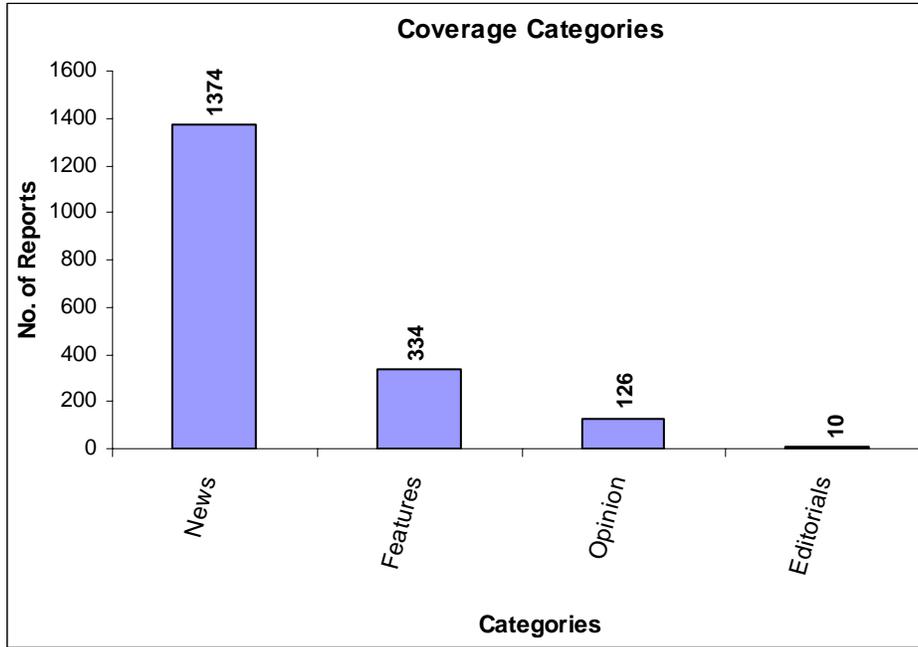
The table revealed that *Post Express* published the highest number of reports of 240, followed by *Comet* 226 and *Daily Times* 204. *The Guardian* had, *Champion* 191, *Punch* 181, *Vanguard* 179, *Thisday* 177 and *Tribune* 152. *Anchor* and *National Interest* had the lowest publications respectively 38 and 22. as both ceased publication halfway into the monitoring.

**TABLE 2**

**COVERAGE CATEGORIES (MARCH 2002 – MARCH 2003)**

New	1,374
Newsfeatures	304
Opinion Articles	126
Editorials	10
Photographs	375
Cartoons	71

This table gives a breakdown of type of coverage by the newspapers. The categories are News, Newsfeatures, Opinion Articles, Editorial, Photographs and Cartoons. News reports expectedly topped since more pages are devoted to it in the newspapers.



**TABLE 3**

**FOCUS OF COVERAGE (MARCH 2002 – MARCH 2003)**

<b>MARCH 2002</b>			<b>AUGUST 2002</b>	
Awareness / Prevention	36		Awareness / Prevention	108
Treatment / Care	37		Treatment / Care	48
			Advocacy	50
Cure Claims	--		Statistics	3
Policy Pronouncements	4		<b>SEPTEMBER 2002</b>	
Advocacy	20		Awareness / Prevention	116
Litigation	1		Treatment / Care	18
<b>APRIL 2002</b>			Litigation	2
Awareness / Prevention	63		<b>OCTOBER 2002</b>	
Treatment / Care	27		Awareness / Prevention	54
Cure Claims	6		Advocacy	47
Advocacy	13		Treatment / Care	31
<b>MAY</b>			Research	2
Awareness / Prevention	75		Advocacy	2
Treatment / Care	24		<b>NOVEMBER 2002</b>	
Cure Claims	4		Awareness / Prevention	79
Advocacy	4		Advocacy / Campaign	53
Policy Pronouncements	6		Treatment / Care	19
Advocacy			Litigation	
71 Campaign	24		Treatment / Care	10
			<b>MARCH</b>	
			Awareness	45
			Advocacy / Campaign	38
			Treatment/Care	11
<b>GRAND TOTALS</b>				
Awareness / Prevention	-	975		
Treatment / Care	-	399		
Advocacy / Campaign	-	393		
Cure Claims	-	10		
Policy Pronouncements	-	10		
Litigation	-	17		
Statistics	-	8		
Research	-	2		

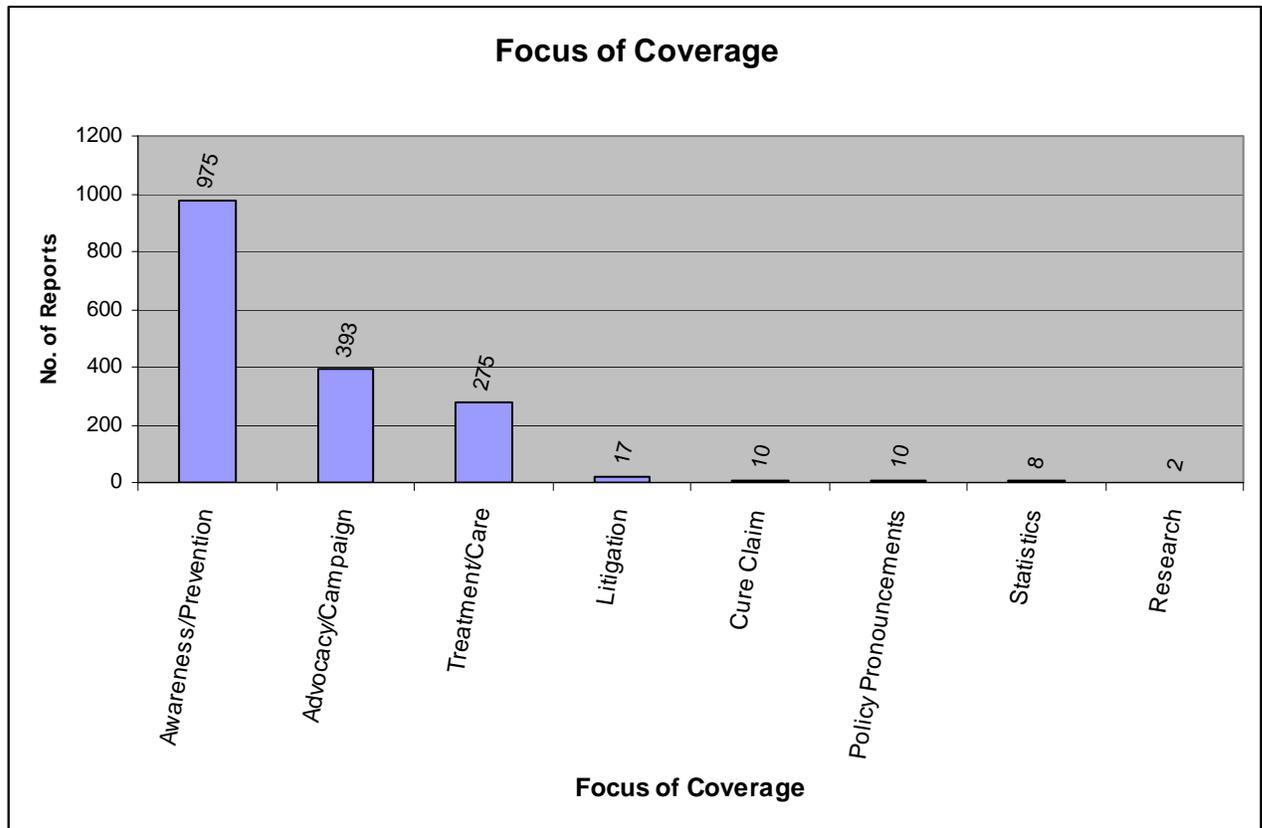
Table 3 shows a breakdown of focus of coverage by the newspapers each month. Focus refers to the issues addressed in the reports and the categories are

Awareness, Prevention, Treatment/Care, Cure Claims, Policy Pronouncements, Advocacy, Litigation and Statistics.

Awareness/Prevention refers to reports which enhance awareness of how to prevent the spread of the HIV/AIDS virus. Treatment/Care refers to stories on the treatment and care of People Living with HIV/AIDS and researches on the virus. Cure Claims refer to claims of cure, especially by alternative medical practitioners.

Policy pronouncements refers to various policies on HIV/AIDS by government and non-governmental agencies. Advocacy refers to reports of campaigns, especially on the rights of PLWHAs. Litigation covers stories on court cases involving HIV/AIDS. Statistics covers stories detailing statistical data on HIV/AIDS.

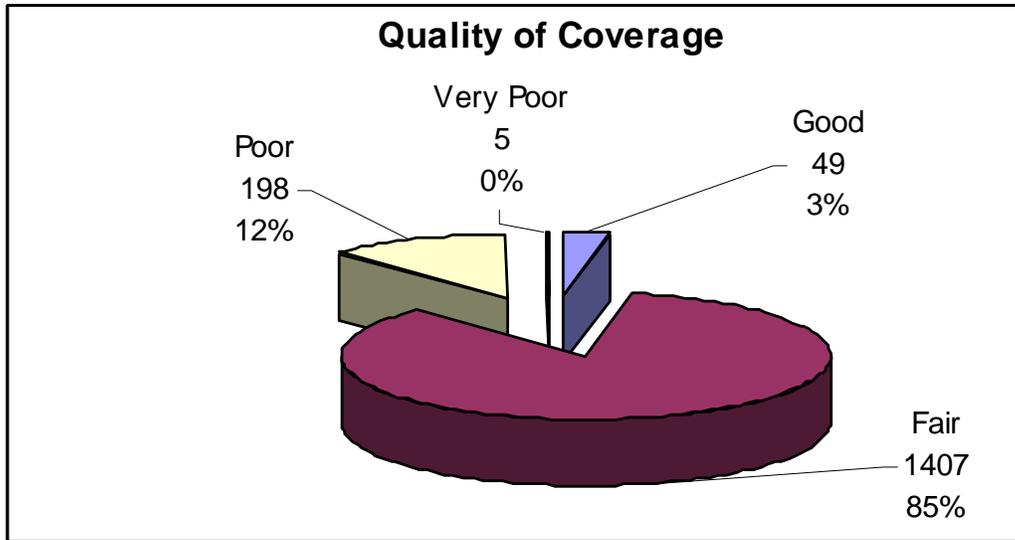
The general breakdown for the 13 months revealed that newspapers published more reports on Awareness / Prevention issues than for any other category. This is not unexpected as there have been increased efforts by the stakeholders to increase public awareness of HIV/AIDS issues.



**TABLE 4 QUALITY OF COVERAGE**

<b><u>MARCH 2002</u></b>		<b><u>JUNE 2002</u></b>	
Very Good	-	Very Good	15
Good	68	Good	130
Fair	29	Fair	22
Poor	5	<b><u>JULY 2002</u></b>	
<b><u>APRIL 2002</u></b>		Very Good	
3			
Very Good	6	Good	191
Good	59	Fair	18
Fair	44	<b><u>AUGUST 2002</u></b>	
<b><u>MAY 2002</u></b>		Very Good	3
Very Good	12	Good	176
Good	92	Fair	20
Fair	11	<b><u>OCTOBER 2002</u></b>	
<b><u>SEPTEMBER 2002</u></b>		Good	
137			
Very Good	-	Fair	5
Good	123	<b><u>DECEMBER 2002</u></b>	
Fair	13	Good	182
<b><u>NOVEMBER 2002</u></b>		Fair	1
Very Good	5	<b><u>FEBRUARY 2003</u></b>	
Good	137	Very Good	5
Fair	16	Good	90
<b><u>JANUARY 2003</u></b>		Fair	10
Good	96		
Fair	1		
<b><u>MARCH 2003</u></b>			
Good	63		
Fair	8		

This table covers the quality of reports covered by the newspapers monitored. The quality of stories was determined by the use of appropriate HIV/AIDS language and terminologies and how useful the stories are to the campaign. Analysis of the stories monitored showed that in the twelve months, most of the stories published were good while a few were very good. Some were however scored fair and poor. There were 49 Good Reports (2.9percent); there were 1407 Fair Reports (84.8percent); there were 353 Poor Reports (11.9percent) and 5 Very Poor reports (0.3percent).



**TABLE 5**

**SPACE ALLOCATION**

**MARCH 2002**

17 Pages

**APRIL 2002**

9 Pages

**MAY 2002**

8 1/3 Pages

**JUNE 2002**

20 Pages

**JULY 2002**

39 1/3 Pages

**AUGUST 2002**

31 Pages

**SEPTEMBER 2002**

26 Pages

**OCTOBER 2002**

22 Pages

**NOVEMBER 2002**

27 Pages

**DECEMBER 2002**

22 Pages

**JANUARY 2003**

27 Pages

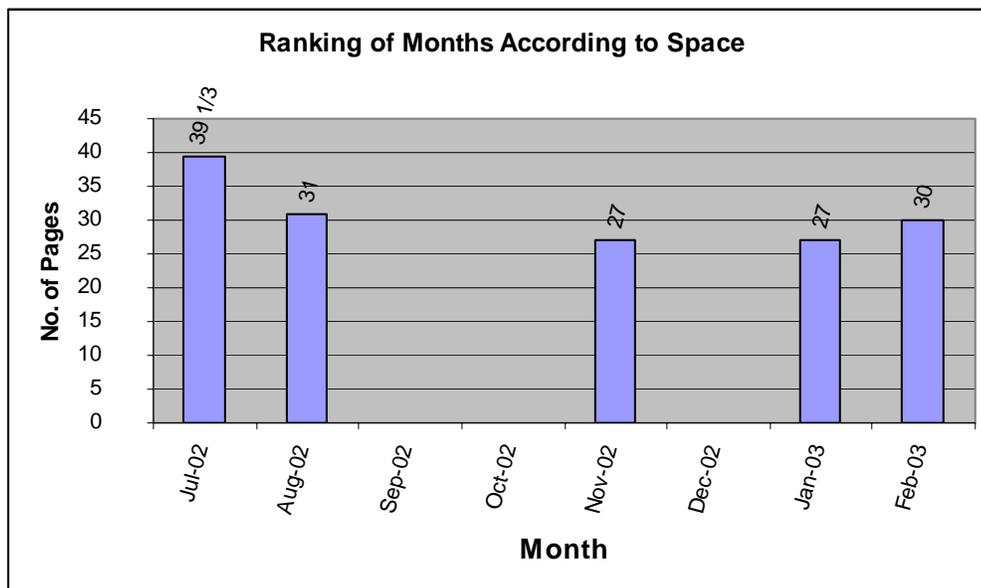
**FEBRUARY 2003**

30 Pages

**MARCH 2003**

20 Pages

This table refers to the space devoted to publication of HIV/AIDS stories in the newspapers monitored. July recorded the highest number of full pages, 39 August 31 and September 26. April had the least 9 full pages.

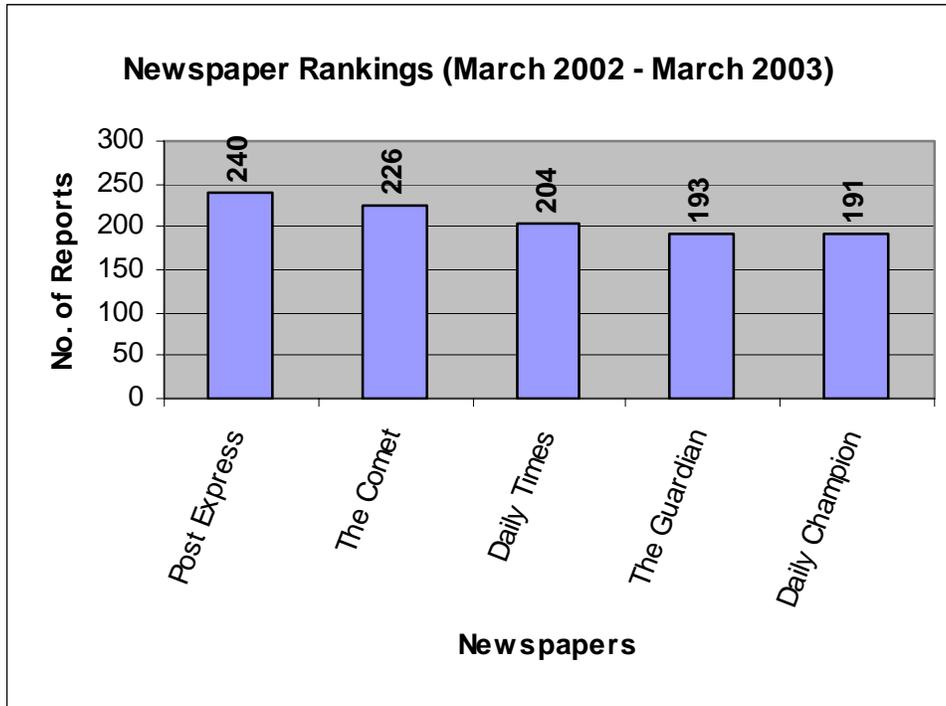


**TABLE 6**

**SOURCE OF REPORTS**

<b><u>MARCH 2002</u></b>		<b><u>OCTOBER 2002</u></b>
5 Culled Agency Reports		Culled 1
197 Original		Original 141
<b><u>APRIL 2002</u></b>		<b><u>NOVEMBER 2002</u></b>
23 Agency Reports		Culled 15
86 Original		Original 139
<b><u>MAY 2002</u></b>		<b><u>DECEMBER 2002</u></b>
10 Agency Reports		Culled 13
105 Original		Original 187
<b><u>JUNE 2002</u></b>		<b><u>JANUARY 2003</u></b>
8 Agency Reports		Culled 11
159 Original		Original 96
<b><u>JULY 2002</u></b>		<b><u>FEBRUARY 2003</u></b>
20 Culled Agency Reports		Culled 9
192 Original		Original 96
<b><u>AUGUST 2002</u></b>		<b><u>MARCH 2003</u></b>
4 Culled Agency Reports		Culled 1
205 Original		Original 70
<b><u>SEPTEMBER 2002</u></b>		
5 Culled Agency Reports		
134 Original		
<b><u>TOTALS</u></b>		
Culled Reports -	122	
Original Reports -	1692	
TOTAL -	1814	

This table refers to the sources of reports published. It is meant to show the number of stories originated by writers or culled from agency reports. In all, each month had more stories originated by newspapers writers while only a few were culled from agency reports and other publications.



## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

“Changing the norms surrounding sex-which is at the heart of HIV prevention-has never been a task best left to men in white coats... When it comes to HIV, more lives will be saved by **journalists**, clergy, teachers and politicians.”

This remark by no less a person than Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS, underlines the need for the media to rise up to the challenges posed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Reporting HIV/AIDS and making it prominent in the media could further be justified by the fact that:

- HIV/AIDS terminates life.
- It is not curable –unlike malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy etc.
- It is caused by a virus: viruses are very difficult to control or eliminate.
- The only fail-safe way to stop HIV is to change people’s behaviour, which is a very difficult task.
- HIV depletes national productivity and reduces societal income.

One can even add that journalists too can contract HIV. This perhaps could pass as the most fundamental reason why the media should give adequate attention to HIV/AIDS coverage. However, in doing this, journalists need to know all they can about HIV/AIDS and issues surrounding it, to enhance contextual reporting. This knowledge acquisition must include knowing certain ethical considerations so as to avoid misinformation, that often leads to further damage and stigmatization

The media must join other segments of society in inducing the positive behavioural change that can halt the epidemic. One good way to start is by stopping sensationalism, inappropriate and stigmatizing language, judgmental reports and numerous inaccuracies, which currently bedevil press coverage of HIV/AIDS.

Various stakeholders groups have offered training and sensitization opportunities for media professionals and thereby enhanced their reporting skills, but much more will have to be done in the days ahead.

The survey nonetheless demonstrated that there had been measurable increase in the quantity and quality of published HIV/AIDS reports and the trend must be sustained.

To ensure greater and more consistent media support for the anti-HIV/AIDS campaign in the near future, the following are crucial:

- Building solid awareness in media professionals about their pivotal role in the battle to arrest the spread of HIV/AIDS.

- Empowering them with resources and skills for discharging their responsibilities effectively.
- Exposing them to the supportive role of the media in fighting HIV/AIDS in other developing countries.
- Rewarding and encouraging stellar performance in a consistent and non-discriminatory manner.

It is essential to build on the modest progress made so far and this is a task for all stakeholders who must work with even greater synergy in the difficult months ahead.

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