

Social mobilisation, ipc, media, ict, messaging, research

PROMISING PRACTICE South Africa: Soul City

INTRODUCTION

Key Promising Practices:

- Development of an edutainment format to rival pure entertainment formats.
- A focus on promoting discussion around the pros and cons of VMMC as opposed to telling audiences what they should and shouldn't do.
- Messaging workshops through which evidence and audience research is examined.
- The creation of spaces for immediate discussion about the themes contained within the Soul City drama, both online and through community dialogues.
- Pioneering use of social media.

Introduction

Soul City is a South African NGO and production company that focuses on HIV prevention through behaviour change communications. They have used funding from CDC to introduce VMMC related storylines into their existing communications vehicles. This began in late 2011 and will come to an end in September 2013, though most VMMC activities have already come to an end.

Target groups

1. The main target audience for Soul City is men aged 15 – 35, which corresponds to the main audience of their TV series.
2. A secondary audience are the female partners of those men.

Demographically, the audience is largely low to middle income and black African.

Scale and scope

The campaign was national and local. The 5 provinces where the social mobilisation was implemented were, Gauteng, North West, Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. The aim of the programme was to create awareness of MMC, increase knowledge about the importance of MMC in HIV Prevention, promoting MMC and promoting safer sexual behaviour after MMC. The national target was to reach 40% of the population, and the local targets differed per province, but supported the Pefar targets for MMC.

Organizations involved

Lead

- Soul City

Funding

- CDC

Who is carrying out demand generation activities?

- Soul City in partnership with PEPFAR partners

Management of demand creation

- Soul City

VMMC ACTIVITIES

VMMC activities

Soul City do not deliver VMMC services, rather promoting take up of service provided by other partners. They promote services broadly, particularly those provided by PEPFAR service providers, the Department of Health and other organisations.

THE APPROACH TO DEMAND CREATION

The approach to Demand Creation:

The approach was to link mass media and social mobilisation to create discussion and debate about the pros and cons of MMC. Soul City has elected to address VMMC in the context of HIV more broadly, focusing on the benefits of HIV prevention, benefits for women and the differences between medical and traditional circumcision.

Key message

In line with their organisational approach, Soul City undertook a literature review and formative research with audiences before designing VMMC messages and programming. At the end of this phase, Soul City convened a message development workshop through which key messages would be refined based on insights about what might motivate or deter the target audience from undertaking VMMC or encouraging their partners or peers to do so.

The report from this meeting notes the key issues arising and the consensus positions on the best way to communicate various VMMC messages. The key output of this

workshop was a message brief, which the makers of the edutainment products could use to develop their themes, characters and storylines.

Following are examples of the guidance offered by the message brief:

1. Sensitivity of traditional circumcision and medical male circumcision.

In some settings traditional circumcision refers to just a small incision on the foreskin, or to a partial removal of the foreskin, in which case it will not give the required protection from HIV infection.

In these settings medical circumcision should be promoted with sensitivity and respect for traditional concepts of health, illness and masculine identity. However, the health benefits of circumcision should not encourage bogus and unsafe circumcision practices as evidenced in settings where young boys get kidnapped or lose their genitalia due to rogue practitioners. Regardless of setting, safety should come first.

2. It is a myth that men have to sleep with many women to cleanse themselves after traditional circumcision.

Sleeping with many partners increases one's risk of contracting HIV, even if one is circumcised. We need to encourage positive aspects of our cultural practices and discard those that put us at risk.

The message brief serves to address the key issues that have surfaced during the formative research and the literature review. In this case, Soul City established a need to include a focus on some of the traditional aspects of circumcision. Interestingly, they were not encouraged to do this by various top-level policy makers, and so found themselves negotiating a situation where, on the one hand, they were addressing the needs of their audiences, and on the other, where they were responding to the institutional concerns of their high-level partners.

Type of intervention

Edutainment refers to any entertainment content that is designed to educate as well as entertain. The best and most impactful edutainment competes on a par with content designed purely to entertain or generate commercial revenue.

Soul City is one of the top billing TV series in South Africa, and the content is produced through a careful and rigorously defined process which ensures that health and development outcomes are achieved while audiences are entertained. Soul City uses an approach that is based on the following steps:

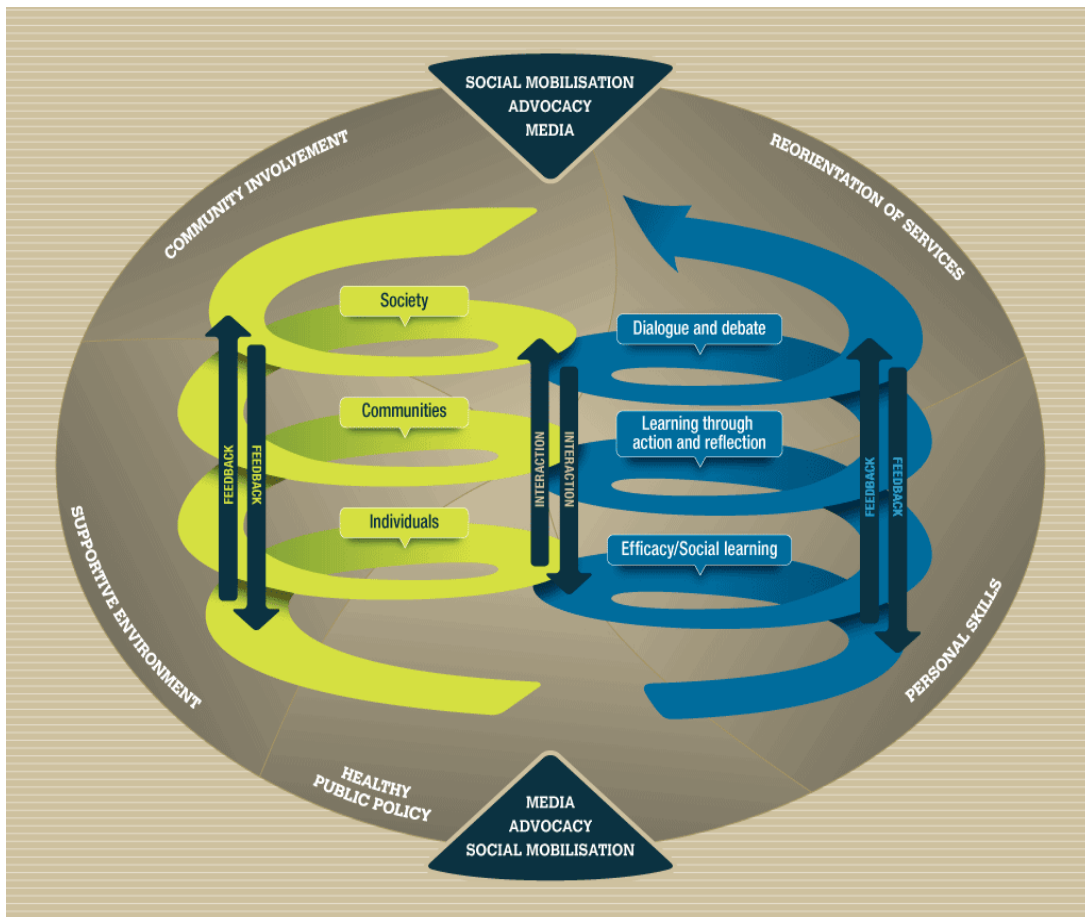
1. Understanding the issue and the context in which it sits – this includes literature reviews, stakeholder analysis, formative research.
2. Design – this includes identifying technical assistance in the thematic area which the output seeks to address to support the creative team who will produce the output and agreeing which messages and discussion points are important and how these will be conveyed. This message brief or consensus document is central to production. The expectation is that all involved will know the message brief by heart in time. In addition, the formative research informs decisions about which channels and formats should be used. There are always a range of possibilities, including social mobilisation, mass media and peer education or drama, psas, magazine programmes and social media. Often the most effective approach is a judicious blend of different channels and formats which are mutually reinforcing. The key is to establish how to best to reach the target audience and which format will appeal to them most. This stage also includes the identification of partners who can help develop and implement a campaign for maximum coverage. The campaign is built around ownership which includes not only Soul City, but also, in the case of VMMC the National AIDS Commission, the relevant UN bodies and a range of civil society organisations.
3. The development of the communications outputs.
4. Pre-testing of communications outputs.
5. Implementation and monitoring monitor the outputs and activities.
6. Evaluation and re-planning. Soul City is one of the most evaluated edutainment organisations in the world, so this step is critical in terms of course correction and process evolution.

Rationale

Soul City puts a great deal of emphasis on the theoretical basis of behaviour change at both social and individual levels. The foundation of Soul City's theory of change has always been the synergy between a health promotion model and a societal model: Soul City aims to impact positively on health and social outcomes by addressing the broader social and community environments, the social-interpersonal environment and individual determinants of health. Soul City feels that a single generic theory will not explain all behaviours in all contexts equally well. Thus in the context of broader health promotion- and societal-level frameworks (where macro-societal factors are understood to shape individual behaviour from higher levels of scale), the main components of Soul City's theory of social and behaviour change comprise the dynamic integration of a number of models of behaviour and theories of change. Soul City is often pointed to as one of the leading organisations behind the "edutainment" approach, wherein popular and

high-quality entertainment formats, such as drama, are used to educate audiences about social issues. This approach provides information and positive role models and enable audiences to follow the consequences – both positive and negative – that characters make in regard to scenarios related to VMMC and sexual health and relationships more broadly.

According to Soul City, communication programmes produce the best results when they work at multiple levels, as shown on the model below. This is a visualisation of how individual level behaviour change interacts with societal level systems and interventions.



The social change approach recognises and highlights the fact that individual change is linked to change in other domains: individuals need community support, effective health care delivery systems and enlightened health policy to make healthy individual health decisions. Hence their aim is to impact on society at the individual, community and socio-political levels.

Soul City draws heavily on social learning theory. This is based on Bandura's highly influential social learning approach, which is that we learn by observing others around us and modelling our behavior on what they do. This approach involves a number of key concepts. There is the concept of reciprocal determination. This refers to behavioral changes that result from interaction between a person and the environment. The change is two-way – a person can influence the environment, and the environment can influence a person. It is an important concept because it deals with the way in which communication involves the individual and relative others: how if we were to change the environment, we can have an influence on the individual and vice versa. Another important concept within social learning theory is behavioural capability. Underlying this concept is the fact that knowledge and skills are required to influence behaviour, and it is important then to provide information and training in order to effect action. Another aspect of social learning theory are expectations. What is important is to engage in the belief of the likely result of action, and to incorporate information about likely results of action in the advice that is given. An individual's actions will be influenced by what they believe to be the result of that action, so engaging with those beliefs is critical in developing entertainment. Self-efficacy is another key concept here, and that relates to an individual's confidence in their own ability to take action and sustain an action. Effectively, can they influence the outside world?

In terms of how theory translates into the practice of entertaining, educating and influencing audiences, strategies includes highlighting strengths in an individual, encouraging them to behave in a manner which generates positive health outcomes and supporting them to approach behaviour change in small, manageable steps by showing them how that can be done

Role models are key: observational learning is based on the fact that we respond to and sometimes imitate role models whom we admire or identify with. It is possible to consider a course of action which is new to us by observing a role model undertake that course of action: it both inspires and informs us about the possible consequences of that action.

Another important concept within social learning is reinforcement, or the fact that a person's behaviour is motivated or deterred by the way that others respond to it.

Entertainment can reinforce by providing incentives, rewards and praise, as well as by influencing social norms so that a positive enabling environment for that behaviour is created and sustained. This is usually more effective than trying to deter the opposite behaviour through negative messaging highlights all the negative aspects of a behaviour and which isolates the person inclined to perform it or.

Social identity theory can also inform entertainment. Individuals often see themselves as part of a wider group. Their beliefs and attitudes will be shaped by the membership of that group. In the case of VMMC, a male may see himself as part of a subgroup that is either circumcised or non-circumcised. If a young man self-identifies as part of a group that has embraced male circumcision, he is more likely to get circumcised.

EVIDENCE BASE

Evidence base

Before production began, Soul City did a literature review on VMMC and conducted focus groups in nine provinces across the country between August and October 2010 to guide messaging.

The specific objectives of the research were:

- To gain insight into target audiences' understanding, attitudes and practices of male circumcision, and HIV Prevention in general.
- To understand the acceptability of the interventions.
- To understand any myths or misinformation about male circumcision.
- To uncover barriers to accessing these prevention services.
- To reveal the best way to communicate these issues to both male and female audiences.

Twenty six focus group discussions were conducted with groups of between 10 – 12 people (260 participants). Participants were from urban, rural and informal settlement communities. Groups were divided according to age group and gender. Men's groups were also divided into groups of men who have been circumcised and the general public.

Data were recorded and transcribed verbatim, then imported into Atlas Ti software and analysed using open ended coding and then grouped into themes. Trained fieldworkers ran the groups using an interview schedule in the home language of the participants. Discussions were recorded, translated and transcribed prior to analysis.

This approach allowed Soul City to make several useful observations about the groups, noting for example how young men from the Eastern and Western Cape held a strong view on protecting traditional circumcision and initiation schools, and on women’s perceptions of VMMC related issues.

DEMAND CREATION ACTIVITIES

Demand Creation Activities

Different platforms and formats were employed in execution of the VMMC campaign. Table 1, below, outlines the different media and social mobilisation elements employed for the series. The core media and social mobilisation elements of series 11 are outlined below:

Platform used	Medium used	Quantity
Mass Media	Television drama series	13 episodes aired
	Radio talk shows	69 talk shows aired
	PMTCT and MMC booklets	193 006 distributed
	Facebook	2959 likes ¹ ;3541 postings
Social Media	Twitter	590 followers
	Young Africa live	6278
Social Mobilisation	Community dialogues	20 conducted

¹ Number of people who liked the post made on the facebook page. “Like” is an icon on Facebook that demonstrates that the users relate and connect with the content posted on the Soul City Facebook page.

Traditional media outputs

- **TV Drama:** Soul City dedicated the main storyline of their eponymous TV drama to VMMC over a 13 episode series which was launched in late 2011/early 2012. The TV drama is one of the most popular in the country (rated 2nd overall) and is focused on issues related to HIV and sexual health. In the series dedicated to VMMC, the topic was raised in each episode of the drama.
- **Radio talk shows:** Directly following every episode of the TV drama, radio talk shows that picked up on and discussed issues raised in the drama would air on 8 community radio stations across the country. There were co-productions between Soul City and the community radio station. A substantial part of these talk shows were dedicated to VMMC while the series ran.
- **Marketing materials:** Soul City also produced nearly half a million booklets on VMMC and other HIV related issues that were based around the characters in the TV drama. These were distributed through health clinics, partners, and newspapers. Thousands of t-shirts and DVD discussion tools for social mobilizers were also distributed.

Media training

Soul City has also supported other implementing partners to engage with radio stations by providing training to 7 stations across the country. These stations in turn produced 16 VMMC related programmes with guest experts from Chaps, Right to Care and other partners.

Social mobilisation

Soul City has also undertaken a number of social mobilization activities, including:

- **Training** over 100 master trainers on VMMC issues, who in turn cascaded information to smaller NGOs and local community groups and conducted over 30 community dialogue sessions over the past year.
- **OneLove Community dialogues** took place in Gauteng, Mpumalanga, KZN, Free State, North West and Limpopo. In some cases, these focussed solely on VMMC, in others VMMC and PMTCT. In one male-only session, the issue of healing arose. A participant helpfully revealed his newly circumcised penis to demonstrate how healing had occurred.

- **Soul City organised 5 or 6 “jamborees” on VMMC.** These were events which brought together VMMC service providers with government providers of other high-volume citizen services (such as the govt benefits office, govt ID cards office) along with music and other entertainment and invitations to local radio stations in order to draw large crowds and then use the opportunity to provide information on VMMC. Soul City has also explored the use of providing prizes and competitions during these events and on other occasions.

Social media

Soul City Series 11 made use of various social media platforms to share information, advance debate and generate interest around the series. City also forged a partnership with the Praekelt Foundation that runs the social mobile phone application, Youth Africa Live (YAL).

- **The social media campaign linked to VMMC was entitled ‘be there when the sparks fly’.** It encouraged TV viewers to tune in and participate in weekly realtime chats on social networks. Cast members acting in character discussed key issues raised in the series with health experts. Soul City Season 11 was the first TV programme to launch such an online initiative and it proved very popular, demonstrated by 2,972 Likes on its FaceBook page, and 485 people ‘chatting’ about the show; 588 Twitter followers and 411 ‘tweets’, and 528 views on YouTube. This show has now ended, but the aim is to continue to grow the online community by including blogs, forums and other online tools.
- **YouTube:** Soul City has a YouTube site on which it shares a range of video media. One advantage of such a site is that it lends itself to analysis of audience usage. For example, Soul City analysed the views² and unique views³ of series 11 videos posted on the YouTube SC page. The findings showed which episodes and what kinds of supporting videos were most popular, and what kinds of supporting video is most popular. In fact, the behind the scenes video had the majority of views/unique views and the generic promo video had the least number of views in comparison to all the videos uploaded. The majority of the viewers were located in South Africa – 67% and the remaining 33% were in other countries.

² Number of times the SC page was viewed

³ Unique viewers indicates the number of unique people who have visited the S.C it’s real page

Mobile applications:

Soul City Institute forged a partnership with Praekelt Foundation that runs a mobile phone application connected to a social network, Young Africa Live. Founded in 2007 Praekelt has to date reached over 50 million people through different platforms. A total of more than 138 531 young people who have access to YAL viewed the topics posted on the “*Soul City, It’s real!*” page. Soul City was able to analyse percentages of people who have viewed the different topics posted on the YAL mobile page. For example, the topic “Under Pressure to have sex” (21%) was the most viewed followed by “Sam wants to get circumcised” (19%). YAL users were also invited to participate in a brief online survey conducted on the platform. YAL users were asked if they have been circumcised or not and if not, whether they would consider circumcision. Soul City was able to make a number of other statements about YAL users, and a full analysis is available from the organisation.

EVALUATION OF DEMAND CREATION ACTIVITIES

Evaluation of demand creation activities

There has never been a formal evaluation of their VMMC demand creation activities but Soul City is able to demonstrate the popularity of their drama in general terms, and indicates that the 2012 National Communication Survey correlate exposure to their show with positive attitudes to VMMC. Soul City has also conducted qualitative reviews of its community dialogue sessions.

The National Communications Survey enables Soul City to establish how often their communications products have been viewed, and how exposure relates to changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices, including those relating to VMMC.

Soul City pretests all its materials through a series of focus groups and stakeholder review meetings to get feedback from the target audiences – and make changes if necessary – before the materials are aired or distributed. Typically, pretesting would be undertaken by a trained facilitator who shows the materials to a sample of the audience. Discussions are structured around simple questions based on the material being shown. Participant responses are recorded, transcribed and later translated and analysed. Where possible, Soul City pretests the materials in a setting as close as possible to those where they would be used. This ensures the feedback received is subject to as few confounding factors as possible.

LEARNING AND SCALE UP

Learning and Scale Up

Successes / Challenges

Successes

- The use of the new media is good for reaching an ever increasing audience and the advantage is that it is interactive and can be anonymous.
- The television programme created debate particularly about the cultural aspects of circumcision, this was valuable in creating debate in the community dialogues.
- Linking the television to the community dialogues enabled rapid engagement in the issues and lively discussion often resulting in dialogue attendees going for circumcision.

Challenges & their mitigations

- Working with clinical partners was useful, but challenging as they have different priorities and were not able to implement the activities they were trained in such as radio interviews, facilitating dialogues and door to door interventions.
- A decrease in funding meant that the full programme couldn't be implemented.

Scale up opportunities

The materials that were produced continue to be available for use in 4 languages. The Soul City series will be replayed on television at prime time, enabling further reach and stimulating further demand.