

REPORT

TEXT TO CHANGE/ AIDS INFORMATION CENTRE

HIV/AIDS SMS PROGRAM ARUA, UGANDA

28th January – 28th February 2009



Compiled by AIC AND TTC,
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Text to Change (TTC) and AIDS Information Centre Uganda (AIC) successfully performed a programme where they are using mobile phones for HIV education and motivate the public to go for HIV counselling and testing services. This was done in Arua a district in the North Western region of Uganda.

Text to Change (TTC) is a Dutch non profit organization with the aim of using mobile phone services to improve health education in regions in the world that are in need of help, concentrating on sub-Saharan Africa. TTC is a complementary service provider using mobile telephony as a medium to communicate about health related issues to support (existing) health communication campaigns. Above that, TTC captures valuable information about behaviour patterns and knowledge levels of mobile phone users which will eventually be fed into the national health system database and help in program planning and policy formation.

BACKGROUND TO THE USE OF MOBILE PHONES TO FIGHT HIV/AIDS IN UGANDA

Despite all efforts, comprehensive knowledge about HIV/ AIDS in Uganda is still low. While it is assumed that almost everyone has heard about HIV/AIDS, only 30% of women and 40% of men had comprehensive knowledge (2006 Uganda demographic and health survey, UDHS) The HIV incidence rate of 370 people per day and 137,000 people per annum in Uganda is also unacceptably high.

Mobile phone technology, whose rapid growth in Uganda provides an avenue to reach millions with HIV/AIDS messages in a relatively easy, practical and cost effective way and as such is the new tool for HIV prevention and awareness campaigns.

The Text to Change project which was first pioneered in Mbarara-Uganda in Africa. It was an initiative aimed at increasing awareness on HIV/AIDS through information giving by use of mobile phone SMS quiz, with the desire that this will increase HIV/AIDS awareness and encourage and motivate participants to access HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) services.

INTRODUCTION

Based on the experiences in Mbarara, the TTC/AIC program performed an expansion of this program through a roll-out in other parts of Uganda, starting in Arua targeting 10,000 MTN subscribers.

This report provides an account of the activities, approaches, achievements and

challenges met in the implementation of the Text to change programme from 28th January– 28th February 2009” at AIC Arua Branch.

MAJOR INTERVENTIONS ACTIVITIES

The AIC Arua Branch, with financial, logistical and technical support from AIC headquarters, Text to Change and the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) employed the following interventions to make the Text to Change program a groundbreaking success.

PREPERATORY MEETING

The preparation started with consultative and planning Meetings held between AIC senior management and Text to Change at AIC headquarters and later at AIC Arua Branch. On December 07, 2008, Mr. Daniel Lukenge (AIC Public Relations and Advocacy Manager) and Mr. Bas Hoefman (Director Text to Change, Amsterdam), held a consultative meeting with the Branch Advisory Committee Chairperson, the Arua BOT representative, Heads of Departments and counselors from AIC Arua branch on rolling the Mbarara experience to Arua Branch. Arua staff was informed that the TTC project would run for six weeks targeting Ten Thousand (10,000) MTN subscribers from the West Nile Region with AIC Arua Branch being the HCT service provider. Participants were to receive interactive text messages in form of multiple choice questions on their mobile phones. When answered correctly, it would automatically guarantee a participant free HCT services and at the same time qualify to enter into weekly draws to win various prizes including mobile phones and airtime. During the meeting the service providers were oriented on the data tool to be used and inputs were given to the quiz based on issues surrounding HIV/AIDS in West Nile and Arua district.

Mobile phone technology, whose rapid growth in Uganda provides an avenue to reach millions with HIV/ AIDS messages in a relatively easy, practical and cost effective way.

PUBLICITY In order to sensitize the general public and create awareness about the Text to Change program, over 100 posters and flyers were posted at strategic locations in Arua town and others distributed to the community by PTC members 60 radio announcements, DJ mentions and spot messages were aired on four FM stations namely radio Pacis, 90.9 FM, Arua One, 88.7 FM, Voice of life 100.9 FM and 94.2 Nile FM.



The AIC Arua Front Desk Assistant Ms Andama Nyai shows a text message presented by a client

This was aimed at preparing the ground for the mobile text messages and differentiating the program from the usual promotions by fake and unlicensed companies that send unsolicited text messages on people's mobile phones. (Refer to appendix 1 for

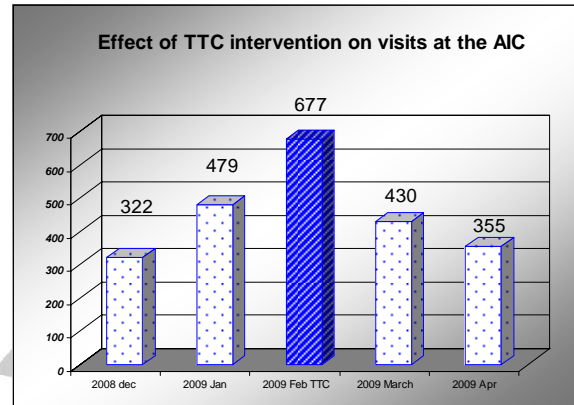
radio spot message the script). One talk show was conducted on Radio Pacis to sensitize the listeners about the program and address potential challenges that may hinder the successful implementation of the program. An estimated total of 5 Million people were reached. The talk show was conducted by the Branch Manager- Lulu Henry Leku, The AIC BOT member-Hon Dick Nyai, the BAC Chairperson- Mr Opima Dan, Mr. Daniel Lukenge (AIC Public relations and Advocacy manager) and Mr. Bas Hoefman (Text to Change, Amsterdam). The Moderator of the show was Flexie.

RESULT OF THE INTERVENTION

Ten Thousand (10,000) MTN subscribers in Arua and West Nile were reached directly with HIV/AIDS messages. Two thousand one hundred (2,100) people were directly involved in the HIV SMS quiz. The number of people accessing HCT services at the branch, other HCT sites in west Nile region and outreaches greatly increased during the project period. A total of 677 (376 Males and 301 Females) people accessed HCT at AIC Arua branch from 28th January – 28th February 2009. This was one of the highest numbers of people served in a space of one month as a result of the program and the various interventions employed. The total includes 131 Couples (262 individuals) and 102 individuals who presented the Text to change SMS text messages before accessing HCT services. This is nearly a 35% increase on the average n° of visitors.

Summary of results at a glance:

Subscribers reached With SMS messages:	10,000
No. involved in quiz:	2100
Number of people who accessed HCT:	677(M=376 F=301)
Number of couples served:	131 (262 Indiv.)



Many prizes in form of airtime and mobile hand sets were given to the winners of the HIV quiz. The winners of mobile hand sets were invited for a prize giving ceremony on the February 27, 2009 at AIC Arua branch premises. The function was attended by Arua branch staff, the Director of Text to Change and Branch Manager who handed over the prizes. The event was witnessed by representatives from the local radio stations and BBC journalist Mr. Joshua Mmali who interviewed the winners and members of AIC Arua post test club. Dialogue on HIV/ AIDS increased in Arua as those who received the quiz questions shared them with their relatives and friends. The complementary responses received emphasized the correct answers. The program has helped to remind people about HIV/AIDS and the need to know one's status. This was evidenced in the open discussion on the streets of Arua town and



Public gatherings as people reach for their mobile phones to retrieve the correct answers received and then share them with friends. The program helped reach more than ten thousand Ugandans with HIV/AIDS messages and inform them of where to access quality HCT services in the region including making services available to the hard to reach populations. Many scholars and other HIV/AIDS partners in the HIV/AIDS arena have applauded the innovative approach to the fight against HIV/AIDS after listening to the BBC program.

"I have never made up my mind to test for HIV until I received messages from Text to Change, each encouraging me to test for HIV at AIC Arua. Now that I know my HIV status, I think I will control my lifestyle". A client from Arua share her risk reduction plans after testing HIV negative.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The Text to Change program is feasible. Many people felt recognized after receiving invitation to take an HIV test on their phones;
- There is still high unmet demand for HCT;
- The uses of SMS/text messages help reach many at a relatively lower cost within a shorter time;
- The program helps to deliver messages without distortion and makes the fight against HIV/AIDS participatory and sustainable as text messages can be stored for a long time and referred to from time to time;
- The program has a long term effect of increasing knowledge about HIV, addressing myths, misconceptions and taboos surrounding HIV/AIDS and stimulating demand for HIV/AIDS services;
- The program needs to be complemented with other media approaches such as radio announcements, DJ mentions, posters, testimonies and experiences from those who have accessed services to realize its full potential. The persistent reminders of people through the text messages compel them to test.

"I heard you and the AIC Executive Director's interview on BBC with Joshua Mali on Text to Change program for HIV prevention! Good Idea. Keep on the innovation" (A text message from HIV specialist from Liberia to Arua Branch Manager)

Recommendations

1. Adequate publicity needs to be done using the appropriate media approaches before and during the program. Due to limitation of resources, Spot messages were aired for one week only;
2. Need to target all mobile networks;
3. Develop and print AIC materials about the program in all local languages including the text messages;
4. Adequate pre-testing of the messages needs to be done;

5. Draws should be done on radio to increase publicity.

Holding weekly draws and sharing the outcome with the local radio stations will motivate more people to participate. But it might not bring more people to get VCT

APPENDIX 1 AIC/TEXT TO CHANGE RADIO SPOT SCRIPT

Start with a message tone.....

FVO: David I have received an HIV/AIDS SMS quiz on my phone, is this not a fake promotion?

MVO: Nooo....this can't be fake! Are you not aware that AIDS Information Centre, Text to Change and MTN are conducting a HIV/ AIDS quiz using text messages to improve knowledge and awareness about HIV/AIDS? From 29th January – 28th February 2009, HIV/AIDS quiz will be sent to MTN subscribers. All those who receive and respond to the questions will get free HIV counselling and testing at AIC Arua offices at Anyafio.

FVO: Is that the only benefit I can get?

MVO: No, there is more, those who will answer the questions correctly enter a weekly draw and stand a chance of winning many more prizes.

MVO&FVO: That is great news! Let's answer the quiz and benefit from the free HIV Counselling and testing at AIDS Information Centre today.



Announcer: The way to HIV Prevention, Care and support is by knowing your HIV Status. Take an HIV test at the AIDS information centre Arua Branch!!!

This message is brought to you by the AIDS Information Centre Uganda. KEY: MVO – Male voice, FVO – Female voice

"This program has helped me and my family to know more about HIV/AIDS because each time I got the message, I called my children to help me read and translate the message in lugbara so that we get the correct answer and win prizes. I am happy that I managed to win air time worth ten thousand shillings and as well know my HIV status at Kuluva Hospital."(A watch man at Kuluva hospital sharing testimony)

Upcoming Programs



HIPS-USAID

Text to change is going to start a SMS based workplace program in cooperation with HIPS. The program will target approx. 10.000 employees of three major private companies and their communities in Uganda:

- Cobalt, Kasese;
- Kinyara Sugar, Masindi;
- Kakira Sugar, Jinja.



We will be working with the peer educators of each company to get access to employee's tel. numbers. The following health issues will be included in our incentive based SMS campaign:

- Family planning;
- HIV counselling;
- Male circumcision (Baseline study).

UN-ECOSOC



Another programme that will be executed in June 2009 will be the Texting4Health initiative in cooperation with UN-ECOSOC.

The following objectives will be central:

- Draw attention to the enormous untapped potential of m-health worldwide

- Demonstrating the new possibilities to collect information in real time through M-polling;
- Showing that mobile communication can be used as a powerful tool to assess knowledge of crucial issues such as disease transmission and prevention;
- Strengthening citizen's overall health awareness.

The content for this campaign is provided by WHO and cover the following 3 main questions:

Question 1:

Yellow Fever

The Yellow fever vaccine protection is for

- 10 years
- 1 year
- 5 years

Question 2:

Tuberculosis

How do you get tuberculosis?

- 1) by shaking hands
- 2) from evil spirits
- 3) by breathing in germs
- 4) from eating food

Question 3:

Child Health

When your child has diarrhoea, what should be done?

1. Give the child more to drink than usual and feed the child
2. Stop feeding the child and give traditional medicine
3. Go to the health centre

For more information:

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