

Full Length Research Paper

# 'Wende Luo' (Luo Songs) as an intervention tool in the fight against HIV/AIDS among the Luo of Western Kenya

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**HIV/AIDS prevention in Africa tend to value literacy or Eurocentric communication approaches such as brochures, posters, radio, newspapers and television more than indigenous modes of communication strategies such as narration (*sigendni*), singing (*wende*) and dancing (*miende*). Mounting evidence indicates that these Eurocentric modes of communication have the potential of alienating and disempowering the people they are intended to inform because the communication process does not start from within their experiences and in many cases are incapable of giving full respect to their values. To make a mark in the fight against HIV/AIDS in African countries there is need to embrace culturally sensitive communication systems in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The traditional systems of communication put greater emphasis on getting the audience involved in perceiving HIV/AIDS as their problem rather than a media, government, non government organization or an international agency agenda. This paper, shares the techniques, insights and lessons learnt from Peres Wenje PhD research work that sought to investigate how the Luo ora-media have been creatively used to create awareness and empower the community to take ownership of the fight against HIV/AIDS.**

**Key words:** HIV/AIDS prevention, culture, mass media and ora-media.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-eighties, the fight against HIV/AIDS has gradually mobilized media, governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations. Despite the concerted efforts by the media, governments, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to disseminate information on HIV/AIDS prevention, there is little impact on the ground as evidenced by the increase in HIV infection and AIDS cases (UNAIDS, 2006). UNAIDS (2006) observes that since the first case of AIDS was reported in 1981, infection with HIV has grown to pandemic proportions. In the year 2005 alone, an estimated 2.8 million people died of AIDS, 4.1 million were newly infected with HIV, and 38.6 million were living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2006). Regionally, the UNAIDS (2006) asserts that although only 10% of the World population lives in sub-Saharan Africa, the region is

home to approximately 64% of the World population living with HIV. In Kenya, according to National AIDS Control Council (Kenya Aids Indicator Survey-KAIS, 2007), by 2007, 1.4 million adults aged between 15 and 49 years were living with HIV, while about 500,000 people were suffering from AIDS. Within Kenya, the status of HIV/AIDS in Nyanza province predominantly occupied by the Luo has been described as "a mature pandemic" because of its high prevalence and devastating impact on individual, household and community levels (IPAR, 2004). The region has the highest prevalence rate in Kenya, which currently stands at 15% (KAIS, 2007). The provincial prevalence rate is significantly above the national prevalence rate, which stands at 8.03% (KAIS, 2007) and that of other Provincial rates: Nairobi (9.0%) Coast (7.9%), Rift Valley (7.0%). Prevalence in Eastern is 4.7% and in Central, 3.8% of the adult population is infected. North Eastern province has the lowest adult HIV prevalence at 1%, (KAIS, 2007). In Nyanza province the effects of AIDS is marked by fresh graves and deserted houses, in homes only inhabited by the old and very

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young, grandmothers and grandchildren (Nyambetha, 2007), and in the weekly funerals that the people attend (Prince, 2004).

From the aforementioned, it can be observed that despite mass media campaigns to inform the public about the (1) the use of condoms; (2) screening for HIV at Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) Centres; (3) prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT); (4) the use of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP); (5) the prompt treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (6) and voluntary male medical circumcision, behavioural changes are not occurring as expected (Elderkin, 1998). It is therefore apparent that a gap exists in the communication process leading to a breakdown in communication on HIV/AIDS information. The ineffectiveness of HIV/AIDS prevention messages can be traced to the media used for the dissemination of the messages among other factors (Elderkin, 1998). The reason is that mass communication is not the same as information for change (Elderkin, 1998).

This is because behaviour change cannot occur when the audience is simply a passive receptor of large amounts of information that is mostly irrelevant to the audience's daily life circumstances (Elderkin, 1998). Change may be realized if the audience is able to process the information offered within the audience's cultural context (Elderkin, 1998).

In mass communication presentations, discussions with the target audience are rarely facilitated. The communication approaches are clearly linear, top-down, expert driven and non-negotiable (Ashcroft and Masilela, 1989). The indigenous knowledge; people's ideas, feelings, cultural values, existing communication channels were presumed to be uneducative and hence totally ignored (Ashcroft and Masilela, 1989). The author's informal evaluation, through everyday interactions with the people, revealed that the community's discourse had little to do with the actual social change message delivered through mass communication. As a matter of fact, the odd items such as airplane-like vehicles, communication technology, urbanite aura, food and drinks were the salient items that fueled and sustained most communal gossip.

An extensive review of literature conducted by this researcher has revealed that there is very little empirical evidence to show the extent to which cultural analysis in general and tradition media in particular informs ongoing efforts at promoting HIV/AIDS prevention measures in Kenya and other African countries. The influence of culture is mentioned in a number of documents, and even in some speeches launching campaigns against HIV/AIDS, but its influence has never been given an in-depth critical analysis. The terms "ora-media", "traditional media", "orature" and "folk media" have often been used interchangeably in referring to any form of endogenous communication system which by virtue of its origin from, and integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in away and manner that requires the utilization of the values, symbols, institutions, and

ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1998). Ora-media thus, refers to how word of mouth and performing techniques are utilized to disseminate information to audiences. The most important feature of ora-media is that it is oral and is performed. Types of folk media include storytelling, puppetry, proverbs, visual art, drama, role play, concerts, gong beating, dirges, songs, drumming and dancing.

The current paper is focused on examining the role of ora-media in the adoption of measures and strategies for the prevention of HIV/AIDS among the Luo of Western Kenya. The region has been observed to be endowed with performing artistry. Some of the most credited musicians from Kenya have their roots in Luoland and have produced songs that have attracted both national and international applause. Some of these musicians include D.O Owino Misiani, Okach Biggy, Dr Osito Kalle, Collela Mazee, Kasongo Wuod gi Ayiera, George Ramogi, Paul Orwa Jasolo, Odhiambo Tusker, Atomi Sifa among others. These artists are currently being used to 'transform' development messages into forms of popular entertainment. The artist, it has been observed reaches a broad cross section of the population than any other communicators. The current study intends to investigate the way the Luo artists are using ora-media to disseminate HIV/AIDS prevention messages to the community, and suggest how ora-media can effectively be used to disseminate HIV/AIDS messages in Nyanza.

In this paper, I confine my discussion of Luo ora-media to *wende Luo* (luo songs) as used in the dissemination of HIV/AIDS prevention messages to the community, and suggest how songs can effectively be used to disseminate HIV/AIDS messages in Nyanza. Akivaga and Odaga (1982) observe that through songs people learn, laugh, mourn, console each other, inspire one another and at times pass secret messages. These attest to the various functions that songs perform. They further argue that songs are about the people's conditions of life.

## MUSIC AND DANCE TRADITIONS OF THE LUO AND HIV/AIDS

The Luo, like other African communities are renowned for their love for music. As Osadebey (1949) points out, we sing when we fight; we sing when we work, we sing when we make love, we sing when we hate, we sing when a child is born, we sing when death takes toll. Among the Luo community, this is reflected in the numerous songs, dances and musical instruments that are found in the community. The Luo music contains much teaching about norms and conventions of the community (Odaga, 2008). Both socio-cultural events and ceremonies among the Luo are musically oriented. For example, beer parties, funerals, worship, story telling and healing ceremonies are in most cases accompanied by songs and dances. Music is also performed to accompany work and rituals. According to Miruka (2001) these songs/oral poetry

include: 'wende malong' (twinbirth songs), 'wende hoyo nyithindo' (lullabies), 'wende nyithindo' (children's songs), 'wende mon' (women's songs), 'wende tich' (work songs), 'wende nyiera' (satirical songs), 'wende hera' (love songs), 'wende kongo' (beer-drinking songs), 'wende pak' (praise songs), 'wende nyatiti' (lyre poetry), 'wende orutu' (orutu songs), 'wende tho kod kuyo' (dirges and songs of sorrow), 'goyo lep' (word play).

The Luo conceptualize music to mean singing, drumming and instrumental playing. According to Kavyu (1987), the Luo believe that a good song is the one that every one wants to remember and sing. They use different terms to refer to various musical concepts and styles of performance. For example, 'wer' means singing or vocal music. 'Wer maber' means good singing and 'wer mami' means sweet singing.

In the Luo community music instruments are performed to support and accompany the vocal section. The Luo musical instruments are grouped as: Idiophones which include instruments such as 'sanduku', 'nyangile', 'ongeng'o' and 'oduong'o', membranophones such as 'bul' and 'kalapapla', chordophones such as 'thum' and 'orutu' and aerophones such as 'abu', 'tung' or 'oporo' and 'asili'. Some Luo dances include 'dodo' or 'dudu', 'yong'o', 'otenga', 'miend tigo', 'miend jo gaga' and 'ramogi'.

Through songs, the Luo express different thoughts and ideas and often focus on social life. In such oral compositions, several comments could be cited whether direct or indirect on a particular social reality. One such area in which Luo songs has been a social commentator can be observed by an examination of how Luo song juggles with HIV/AIDS issues within the Luo country.

Within the study districts, that is, Migori, Siaya and Kisumu, community theatre groups as well as music and drama clubs in various schools have mobilized the youths within their reach to fight AIDS pandemic. The groups use songs and puppetry to sensitize the community about HIV/AIDS.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive and adopted a cross-sectional design. The study was designed in such a way as to investigate how Luo songs have been appropriated as a tool for promoting public health campaigns in the fight against HIV/AIDS. It was envisaged that the cross-sectional design would enable the researcher collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The data for the study was collected for a period of six months. The first part of data collection involved quantitative data collection methods while the second part involved qualitative data collection.

### Study site

The study was carried out in Nyanza province, Kenya. The area lies within the Lake Victoria basin. The study focused on the Luo people, who are agropastoral group of Nilotic cluster of societies (Ogot, 1967a). The Luo speak *Dholuo* language, which has a Nil-Saharan and eastern Sudanic accent and affiliation (Ogot, 1967b).

The choice of Nyanza province as the site for the current study was motivated by the fact that the province has for the past two decades recorded the highest HIV prevalence in Kenya, with the latest being 15.3% against national figure of 8.03% (KAIS, 2007). The province is located on the south western part of Kenya and covers an area of 16,162 km<sup>2</sup>.

The data for the study was collected from the three representational districts of Nyanza province. Migori represented the greater southern Nyanza region. Kisumu was next and accounted for the central part of the province. The third district was Siaya representing the northern part of Nyanza.

Two divisions in each district were purposively sampled depending on the availability of theatre groups. Within the study districts, that is, Migori, Siaya and Kisumu, community theatre groups as well as music and drama clubs in various schools have mobilized the youths within their reach to fight AIDS pandemic. The groups use folk media and puppetry to sensitize the community about HIV/AIDS.

### Selection of study participants

One hundred and fifty nine (159) individual members of theatre groups, three District Social Development Officers, three District Cultural Officers, six (two in every district) leaders of theatre groups and six (two from each district) church leaders were purposively selected to provide information on the use of Luo songs in the fight against HIV/AIDS. A total of six (6) focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted, that is two (2) per given district.

The main unit of analysis was the individual member of a theatre group in the area of study from whom data was gathered through interview schedules, observation schedules and focus groups.

### Data collection

Data was collected by six trained graduate research assistants (three males and three females) using a pre-coded questionnaire administered to each respondent in a face-to-face household interview.

The quantitative data was supplemented with qualitative research findings, which included open ended questions that gave the respondent a chance to give his/her own suggestion or comment about the media use habits, their preferences, attitude towards the existing channels and his/her perception on the coverage of various health issues/topics. Other questions also helped to explore the demographic data such as marital status, religion, level of education, composition of family, type of house the respondent lives in and their source of income. The data collection exercise took thirty days running from 7 April to 7 October 2008 and this was done concurrently in all the districts by well trained research assistants.

### Data entry and analysis

The quantitative data collected through face-to-face interview was entered into a Statistical Analysis Systems (SAS) programme. Data analysis was done using SAS and Ms Excel. The tool was used to establish age, gender, average monthly income, place of residence, levels of education, and levels of income and media accessibility by the interviewees.

The Luo ora-media from participant observations were translated from Luo to English language using the translation theory by Steiner (1992) for the purposes of description and analysis. They were analyzed into the following thematic areas: the types of ora-media present among the Luo, the Luo ora-media with HIV/AIDS characters, the major themes on HIV/AIDS from the Luo ora-media and the effectiveness of the Luo ora-media in disseminating

HIV/AIDS prevention messages. This mainly involved content analysis of the various orature types collected. Data from the key informant interviews and focus group discussion were analyzed by identifying insights and implicatures that were used to explain observed patterns. Based on the above procedures, generalizations were drawn after in-depth discussion of the findings.

### Ethical considerations

Certain ethical challenges were associated with respondents infected and affected by HIV. Most of them expressed reservation about their HIV status being disclosed to others. Other respondents deliberately concealed information for fear that it could be publicized in the media. The purpose of the study and their roles was explained to them before seeking their informed consent. It was made clear to the respondents that the data collected was purely for academic purposes and not for any other use. The respondents' identity was to remain anonymous.

Another ethical issue encountered during the data collection stage was that sexuality is a sensitive issue and so not all respondents felt easy providing information about their sexual life. Some were shy, others felt offended by some questions, yet others demanded financial reward to be able to provide information. To overcome this challenge, the objectives of the study were explained to the respondents before seeking their participation in the research. It was made clear to them that they would not be provided with material benefits because of their participation in the study.

## RESULTS

### Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Among the 159 respondents interviewed during the study, a majority at 36.1% were in the age group 15-19 years. From the total respondents interviewed 82 were male whereas 77 were female. An important aim of the study was to better understand how the sex differentials among the respondents are related to media accessibility and utilization. The majority 63/159 (39.6%) of the respondents were residing in rural areas. During the study it was observed that most respondents (34.67%) either had no education or stopped in primary school. Among the respondents, almost a half (49.58%) of the households live in mud walled houses with iron roofing. The shelter condition of respondents is an important marker of their economic status. Fishing was the main economic activity of the respondents at 36.3%. It is a huge industry comprising of boat builders and repairers, fishing nets and gear manufacturers, boat engine mechanics, fish purchasers, sellers and processors, truck drivers who transport the fish and businessmen. Among the respondents the most preferred language when speaking was Dholuo at 62.7%. It is also the second most preferred (53.90%) when writing or reading; this is irrespective of which language a respondent uses most in speaking. A majority of respondents at 93.6% were aware of existence of HIV/AIDS pandemic. Table 1 gives a summary of socio-demographic status of the study's

respondents.

The respondents sources of information about HIV/AIDS was cross tabulated with the socio-demographic characteristics of age, location, gender, education and the types of houses the respondents were living. Chi-square statistic was used to test the significance of the correlation.

During the study, it was observed that the social demographic characteristic features of respondents such as the location, age, gender, levels of education, occupation and the types of houses the respondents resided in were found to influence media accessibility by the respondents (Table 2). Those with less education, residing in rural and semi-urban areas, low incomes and poor residence cited ora-media as their primary source of information.

In this paper, I focus on few samples of Luo songs which are used to disseminate HIV/AIDS messages. Although an analysis of just a few Luo songs cannot lead to generalization of the research findings, the selected samples provide insights into the relevance of these types of ora-media as means of educating the Luo community on the dangers of HIV/AIDS. The interest in these forms is driven by the fact that they are most recurring in the daily livelihood of the Luo, and that they cut across all the ages.

### Wende Luo (Songs and Poems) and HIV/AIDS

Among the 159 informants interviewed, 155 representing 97.47% had heard HIV/AIDS prevention messages through songs and poems. The preferred use of songs and poems in conveying HIV/AIDS prevention messages is based on the fact that it appeals to the people's feelings as compared to other forms of Luo orature. This appeal draws from the images that it uses and the simplicity of the language with which oral poetry is marked.

In one song collected from one of the theatre groups, HIV/AIDS prevalence in the study districts is captured as below:

Song 1: Ramogi Dance (*Miend Ramogi*)

*Sol: Juluo uhero sunga gi raha x2*  
*Pengle kunyamo big G pengle kunyamo*  
*Miraa Pengle kibrit oluar epi*  
*All: Joluo uhero sunga gi raha x2*  
*Pengle kunyamo big G pengle kunyamo*  
*miraa Pengle kibrit oluar epi*  
*Sol: Wuololo – wuololo ee wuololo – wuololo eee*  
*Jokenya wuoro ee----x2*  
*Joramogi en ango mutimo ---x2*  
*Onagi wuoro --- ---x2*  
*All: Wuololo wuololo ----wuololo –eee x2*  
*Sol: Kisumu dala en ango mutimo x2*  
*Jokenya wuoro eeh ---x2*

*Jothurwa yawa wanatim angowa ---x2*  
*Oganda rumo eh – eh x2*

Source: Ang'ugo Primary School (Kadem)

### RAMOGI DANCE:

Sol: The Luo love pride and pleasure  
 Pengle as you chew big G pengle as you chew  
 Miraa Pengle the match box is dropped into  
 water.

All: Wuololo---- wuololo----wuololo----wuololo  
 Kenyans are scared  
 The Luos what have you done  
 The Luos are scared.

Sol: Kisumu city what is it that you have done  
 Kenyans are scared  
 My clansmen what shall we do?  
 People are getting finished

This is a popular song that is usually accompanied by a Ramogi dance. Note that '*pengle*' is an ideophonic word that suggests the sound with which the things mentioned would drop.

Among the Luo youths the chewing of the big G chewing gum is a pride unlike other gums. However, this pride and pleasure is short term as it only leads to death. There is metaphorical reference of a match box which is dropped into water. This is suggestive of a man or a woman who has fallen a victim of the scourge hence his/her death.

The song poses rhetorical questions for the Luos and the people of Kisumu about what they might have done to realize the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. One also notes a call and response pattern (antiphony) which might be interpreted in another level to represent the collective responsibility that this war deserves. The scourge has also been branded evil as it consumes people and may probably consume everybody if it is not trampled upon.

Commercial sex and "sex for fish" trade was found to be recurrent themes in Luo orature given that they contribute highly in the spread of HIV/AIDS. According to the respondents many widows who have since lost their husbands mostly through HIV/AIDS, have moved to beaches where their background is not well known by majority. Such women may not have enough capital to start a fish business and therefore offer themselves for sex to the fishermen in exchange for fish which they can later sell at "no loss"

In one song the whole idea of casual sex is satirized as follows:

Song 2: Prostitute (*Ochot*)

Solo: *Ochot moro ni e kambi ka to chunya gombe,*  
*angang moro ni e kambi*

*ka to chunya gombe*

All: *Ochot moro ni e kambi ka to chunya gombe*  
*angang moro ni e kambi*

*ka to chunya gombe*

Solo: *Mbas merwa tieko na pesa*

All: *Aa ero okadho*

Solo: *Mbas merwa to auso ne lowo*

All: *Aa ero okadho*

Solo: *Mbas merwa ni mona nindo*

All: *Aa ero okadho*

Solo: There is some prostitute in this camp whom my heart admires x2

All: There is some prostitute in this camp whom my heart admires x2

Solo: My mother's age mate who depletes my cash

All: There she passes

Solo: My mother's age mate who causes me sleepless nights

All: There she passes

Source: TOYPE – Karungu (Migori District)

In song 2, the whole idea of casual sex is satirized through the irony of one wanting or having sex desires with someone, the age mate of his mother! It is also important to note the choice of words in this poem. Although the soloist admires this new lady in the camp, he refers to her as '*ochot*' and '*angang*'. These are very derogative words that only serve to belittle one and to point out "her looseness" as a harlot.c

A good song should move its audience towards realization of the songs message. By now, one cannot help observing what the intended purposes of the songs are. The songs have two vital functions. The first is to win sympathy in a sad and suffering situation. The words in the songs and gestures observed by the researcher strongly highlight this. The effect of the song on the audience is easy to observe, for they grimace at the pain caused by the epidemic through tonal variation.

On the other hand the song is therapeutic to those affected by HIV/AIDS. The song acts as an outlet of frustration. Through the audience participation in the singing they soon realize that they are not alone. The call and response mode was used to create a non-threatening and enabling environment for open discussion about HIV/AIDS.

### Effectiveness of Luo songs on behavior change

During the research I found out that majority of theatre group members were fairly informed on matters of HIV/AIDS (Table 1). They were fully conversant with its mode of transmission and that the disease has no cure. Some members of the theatre clubs had seen video on dangers of contracting HIV/AIDS such as the '*Silent Epidemic*', a twenty minute video sponsored by UNICEF Kenya and produced by Ace Communication Studios.

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
District	Migori	50	31.4
	Kisumu	53	33.3
	Siaya	56	35.3
	Total	159	100.0
Location of the Respondent	Rural	63	39.6
	Semi-Urban	55	34.6
	Urban	41	25.8
	Total	159	100
Gender	Male	82	51.2
	Female	77	48.8
	Total	159	100
Age	15-19	57	36.1
	20-25	40	25.1
	26-30	24	14.9
	31-35	16	10.3
	36-40	10	6.3
	41-45	12	7.3
	Total	159	100
Education	No Formal Education	6	3.76
	Primary Complete	23	14.44
	Primary incomplete	26	16.47
	Secondary incomplete	40	25.19
	Secondary complete	36	22.93
	post secondary	27	17.22
	Total	159	100.0
Occupation	Still in School	9	5.8
	No Source of Income	20	12.5
	Fishing	58	36.3
	Personal business	4	2.4
	Formal employment	41	25.6
	Casual work	26	16.3
	Others	1	1.1
	Total	159	100.0
Types of Houses	Mud wall and grass thatched	16	9.96
	Mud wall and iron roofing	79	49.58
	Wooden wall /Makuti wall	3	2.15
	Brick wall/Stone wall	58	36.55
	Others	3	1.76
	Total	159	100.0
Preferred Language of Speaking	Dholuo	100	62.7
	English	43	27.0
	Kiswahili	6	3.7
	Others	10	6.6
	Total	159	100.0

Table 1. Contd.

Preferred Language of Reading/Writing	Dholuo	49	31.0
	English	94	59.3
	Kiswahili	13	8.0
	others	3	1.7
	Total	159	100.0
Knowledge of HIV/AIDS among respondents	AIDS kills	149	93.6
	AIDS does not have cure	146	92.0
	The Disease could be transmitted from mother-to-child	145	91.0
	The Disease could be transmitted through blood transfusion	146	92.0
	HIV could be contracted from sexual intercourse	148	92.9

This video depicted horrifying pictures of HIV/AIDS related ailments. Some theatre group members were also aware of a magazine called 'Straight talk' a monthly pull out from Standard newspaper that talked about teen reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and other issues pertaining to young people. Some school based theatre groups had a HIV/AIDS resource book titled 'bloom or Doom' produced by Kenya Institute of Education (KIE). Other sources of HIV/AIDS awareness information was radio, posters, burial ceremonies, hospitals, NGOs and Chiefs' and assistant chiefs' barazas. However, despite the existence of such awareness resources, the theatre group members' attitude or behaviour towards HIV/AIDS remained largely unchanged. This led the researcher into investigating whether there is a mismatch between channels of communicating HIV/AIDS messages on one hand, and the target audiences on the other. The following table compares the different sources of information and how they are responsible for different reaction by the recipient audiences.

It can be observed from Table 3 that 29 out of 58 of those who received information on HIV/AIDS through ora-media of songs took an initiative of establishing their HIV status by visiting VCT centres compared to only sixteen out of fifty two whose source of information was radio. In the words of one drama tutor, Chris Obure:

*"Ora-media of song is a highly effective tool for educating people as it links the cognitive and the effective. Its main point being role-play, it gives the adult an acceptable but rare opportunity to learn through "playing", these are processes, that have been hitherto hidden to me (I believe still hidden to many people)". C.O.*

Another teacher from Ulumbi Secondary school observed:

*"it was the first time I saw issues related to HIV/AIDS being discussed in the open forum by young girls and boys without any inhibition, fear or threat" Miss Eunice Omondi, CRE teacher.*

On one occasion after a performance of song on HIV/AIDS at Sori secondary school, this is what their Chemistry teacher had to say: 'The students are talking about it everywhere. They remember all the details. But ask them about 'Archimedes Principle' that they learnt about yesterday and they will just scratch their heads!' Mr David Ondiwa A Chemistry teacher at Sori Secondary school.

The effectiveness of Luo songs in disseminating HIV/AIDS messages springs from the fact that, songs, are powerful medium of social education of the society's customs and values from one generation to the next transmitted through the spoken word.

## DISCUSSION

This study shows that there is a mismatch between the media used to disseminate HIV/AIDS information on one hand and target audience on the other. Though majority of the respondents interviewed were aware of the existence of the pandemic, majority of them had not changed their behaviour to avoid the disease, leading to such questions as to why there is no behaviour change that corresponds to the level of HIV/AIDS awareness. For example, despite massive print, radio and television campaigns on the need of knowing one's HIV status by visiting VCT centres, more than half of the respondents failed to heed the advice. Behavior change can only occur if the audience is able to process the information offered within its cultural context. An important channel of communication that takes into account the cultural aspect of a community is the indigenous modes of performative communication, such as ora-media. Those respondents who received the same information through ora-media means responded to the call overwhelmingly. In the words of one female respondent:

*"After attending a magnet theatre (MT) rehearsal- a form of participatory and interactive community theatre that takes place in the community. I went home with many questions regarding my HIV status. After agonizing for a*

**Table 2.** The relationship between social demographic characteristics and access to media by the respondents.

Variable	Characteristic	OM (%)	Radio (%)	N (%)	TV (%)	Others (%)
Age	15-19	21(36.8)	18(31.6)	5(8.8)	9(15.8)	4(7.0)
	20-25	13(32.5)	15(37.5)	5(12.5)	6(15%)	1(2.5)
	26-30	8(33.3)	9(37.5)	3(12.5)	4(16.7)	1(4.2)
	31-35	7(43.8)	5(31.3)	1(6.3)	3(18.8)	1(6.3)
	36-40	4(40)	3(30)	1(10)	1(10)	1(10)
	41-45	5(41.7)	3(25)	1(8.3)	1(8.3)	2(16.7)
location	Rural	24(38)	21(33.3)	8(12.7)	6(9.5)	4(6.3)
	Semi-Urban	21(38.2)	18(32.7)	7(12.7)	8(14.5)	1(1.8)
	Urban	7(24.3)	12(29.3)	10(17.1)	9(22)	3(7.3)
Gender	Male	32(39)	28(34.1)	8(9.8)	12(14.6)	2(2.4)
	Female	26(33.8)	24(28.6)	7(9.1)	9(11.7)	1(1.3)
Education	NFE	3(50)	2(33.3)	0	1(16.7)	0
	PC	10(43.5)	9(39.1)	1(4.3)	2(8.7)	1(4.3)
	PI	12(46.2)	8(30.8)	2(7.7)	3(11.5)	3(11.5)
	SI	15(37.5)	11(27.5)	4(10)	6(15)	4(10)
	SC	5(13.9)	13(36.1)	8(22.2)	9(25)	1(2.8)
	PS	6(22.2)	10(37.0)	4(14.8)	5(18.5)	2(7.4)
Occupation	Still in School	3(33.3)	5(55.6)	0	0	1(11.1)
	No Source of Income	9(45)	7(35)	0	2(10)	2(10)
	Fishing	24(41.4)	23(39.7)	2(3.4)	8(13.8)	1(1.7)
	Personal Business	2(50)	2(50)	0	0	0
	Formal Employment	8(19.5)	19(46.3)	5(12.3)	7(17.1)	2(4.9)
	Casual work	11(42.3)	9(34.6)	2(7.7)	3(11.3)	1(3.8)
Types of houses	MWGT	9(56.3)	6(37.5)	0	0	1(6.3)
	MWIR	36(45.6)	33(41.8)	3(3.8)	3(3.8)	1(1.3)
	WW /MW	2(66.7)	1(33.3)	0	0	0
	Brick wall/Stone wall	15(25.9)	19(32.8)	10(17.2)	12(20.7)	2(3.4)

OM, ora-media; N, newspapers; TV, television. NFE, no formal education; PC, primary complete; PI, primary incomplete. SI, secondary incomplete; SC, secondary complete; PS, post secondary. MWGT, mud wall grass thatched; MWIR, mud wall iron roofing; WW/MW, wooden wall/ makuti wall; BW/SW, brick wall/stone wall.

*week, I decided to seek more information from a nearby HIV testing centre. After discussion with the counseling personnel in the centre, I decided to be tested. When I came back I talked to 14 close friends (six Male and eight Females). They asked many questions about VCT. One by one, the friends started taking the tests. I can confirm that all the 14 friends have been tested".*

The current finding agrees with other studies done elsewhere. For example, in an Indian study, Kumar (2006: 1), working among different caste classes, creed and tribes advocated for use of traditional media to reach common people in the process of change and development in India. In Ghana, Panford et al. (2001: 1)

have suggested the integration of folk media such as songs, proverbs, storytelling and dancing with radio for HIV/AIDS prevention in rural Ghana.

Another mismatch in HIV/AIDS mass media campaigns is in the area of language. Although most mass media campaigns have primarily used the official languages of English and Kiswahili, this study shows that the most preferred language when speaking was Dholuo at 62.7%. It is also the second most preferred (31.0%) when reading and writing; this is irrespective of which language a respondent uses most in speaking. This finding is in line with what Adegbija (1994) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) have pointed out concerning language use in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, Adegbija (1994: 3) says

**Table 3.** The relationship between media accessibility and behaviour change among the respondents (Determined by the number of those who visited VCT after receiving information from various media sources).

Type of media	Gender	Visited VCT	Did not visit VCT	Total
Songs	Male	15	17	32
	Female	14	12	26
Radio	Male	7	21	28
	Female	9	15	24
Newspaper	Male	2	6	8
	Female	3	4	7
Television	Male	3	9	12
	Female	1	8	9
Others	Male	1	6	7
	Female	1	5	6

that: "Many of the indigenous people are ignorant of the day-to-day happenings in government circles and are unable to participate effectively in national life. Part of the ignorance stems from lack of access to information in the languages that people understand. Ngugi (1986: 13) on his part observes that, any language has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. English for example is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and Denmark. But for Swedish and Danish people English is only a means of communication. It is not a carrier of their culture and history. It is additionally, and inseparable from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture and history. The foregoing observations are in line with the key finding of the present study which shows that in order to effectively run an anti-HIV/AIDS campaign there is need to use the language the local community employ in their daily discourse on HIV/AIDS.

The socio-economic status of respondents' location seems to have effect on the media accessibility. Theatre group members residing in urban areas get most of their information on HIV/AIDS from radio and the newspapers. On the contrary, those theatre group members residing in Rural and semi-urban areas preferred ora-media as their main source of information on HIV/AIDS. This could be explained by the fact that most urban residents are working class themselves or dependent on their working relatives, unlike peasants in the rural community. They can somehow afford to buy newspapers once in a while and they can access radio because they have access to electricity or can afford dry cells for powering their radios. This finding is in line with Ranganath (1976: 25) assertion that folk media are comparatively cheap. They do not have to be imported. They belong to the community and not to individuals, state or private/public industry.

Our study showed that people with low levels of education, that is, those with no education, primary incomplete, primary complete and secondary incomplete consider ora-media as their main source of information. However, those with good education cited expensive mechanisms for disseminating information such as radio, newspapers and television as their source of information. The finding agrees with other studies that showed the levels of education determines audiences' media choice. Dissanayake (1977: 122-124), listing advantages folk media have over mass media in social development in poorer countries, said the peasants consider mass media to be elitist and alien and identified with centers of power. Dissanayake adds that traditional media employ the idiom of the people and the symbols which are readily intelligible to them, reach a part of the population that is impervious to the influence of mass media and demand active participation in the process of communication. What is the significance of this to the Kenyan context?

### Implications for HIV/AIDS policy and Interventions

Our findings imply that there is need to redesign HIV/AIDS communication strategy in Kenya and Nyanza in particular. It has become apparent that the use of mass media such as radio, newspapers and television in their present form can not adequately relay HIV/AIDS prevention messages to majority of population in most sub-Saharan countries, because they do not reach enough of the population with credible and relevant information. An effective communication strategy is that which takes into account the cultural aspect of recipient community. Ora-media should be given prominence by HIV/AIDS communication strategies particularly those targeting

rural community as it is the media which takes into account activities, beliefs and customs of local population.

It is necessary to give consideration to socio-economic conditions of audience such as location, age, education levels, and type of shelter, occupation and gender when designing and presenting HIV/AIDS prevention messages. A critical look at these factors can help in developing audience-specific messages.

## Conclusion

This study has revealed that there is need to re-evaluate the existing HIV/AIDS communication strategies particularly those targeting the rural population. Instead of volarizing literacy or Eurocentric communication channels such as radio, newspapers and television they should focus on Afro-centred ora-media such as singing, storytelling, drama and proverbs. Mounting evidence indicates that the euro-centered communication means to a large extent do alienates and disempowers their audience from the communication process. In order to make a dent in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa, there is need for culturally sensitive intervention that put greater emphasis on getting the people involved in perceiving HIV/AIDS as their problem.

Although ora-media are yet to be recognized in most Western literature as important tools of education in most aspects of African social life, the effectiveness of ora-media in changing negative social behaviours in rural Africa is clear. Rural Africa, including the study site we have described in Western Kenya, is endowed with rich, popular means of communication including songs, proverbs, storytelling, dancing, drama and poetry recitals. It is therefore, imperative that interventions which aim at behavior change and sustainability in rural Africa settings to recognize and use the potential of ora-media for the benefit of rural community.

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