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Assessing "beneficiary" communities' participation in HIV/AIDS communication through community radio: X-K FM as a case study

ABSTRACT

This article gives account of a research study that was conducted on a "beneficiary" community's participation in HIV/AIDS communication through a community radio station. The aim was to understand the community's presence and access to dialogue on HIV/AIDS, as practiced by their community radio station. The research underpinning the article focused on a community radio station based in Platfontein, Kimberley, in South Africa. X-K FM is a community radio station with !Xun and Khwe people as its primary target audience. The station is the only formal communication channel that targets these communities in their respective mother tongues. The researchers attempted to understand civil voices' participation in and access to the strategies of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, support and treatment. The article is underpinned by Jürgen Habermas's theory of structural transformation of the public sphere. Research data was gathered using semi-structured interviews. The article concludes that the radio station has provided some avenues to facilitate the process of beneficiary community participation in HIV/AIDS communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication assumes an important role in the strategies of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, support and treatment. In the context of HIV/AIDS, awareness is carried through various media campaigns. Such campaigns include any communication activity involving content that is related to HIV/AIDS. This communication occurs through diverse channels and, in the case of mass media, mainly occurs through television, radio, print and outdoor advertising (Parker, 2006). The research underpinning this article aimed at understanding the different roles that participatory communication in community radio stations could play in turning the tide against HIV/AIDS. HIV communication is an effective, cost-effective and a crucial alternative to clinical HIV-prevention interventions (Scalway, 2010). Without communication and educational measures, HIV/AIDS poses a serious threat to South Africa and the world at large (Bauer & Scott, 2005). Recent reports indicate that South Africa is losing the war against HIV infection (Child, 2014; South African National AIDS Survey, 2014; UNAIDS, 2014). Unprotected sex and multiple sexual partners (MCP) are some of the factors that contributed to a rise in people living with HIV in South Africa. Recent reports indicate that the rate of those living with HIV now stand at an all-time high of 6.4 million individuals (UNAIDS, 2014).

This article reports on a study that assessed how a community, targeted with health-related media messages, participates in the process of HIV/AIDS communication at a community radio level. The study applied a case study approach, investigating a single community radio station (X-K FM) based in Platfontein, Kimberley, in the Northern Cape Province of the Republic of South Africa. The overall objective of the researchers was to examine the openness of the station as a notional public sphere that allows public discourse on, and participation in, HIV/AIDS communication by a "beneficiary" community. A supportive environment in terms of HIV/AIDS requires national and community-wide discussions on relationships, sex and sexuality, risk settings, risk behaviours and cultural practices that may increase the likelihood of HIV transmission (The Family Health Institute Report, 2002). The research was conducted by focusing on the following research objectives: (i) understanding the current practice of community participation in designing HIV/AIDS communication strategies at X-K FM; (ii) assessing how target audiences understand their participation in HIV/AIDS broadcast content; (iii) evaluating policies that encourage participation in HIV/AIDS content; and (iv) researching stakeholder perceptions of HIV/AIDS messages broadcast by X-K FM. To arrive at a conclusion on whether the beneficiary community participates in the station's HIV/AIDS communication content, the study assessed participation using the Habermasian sense of public sphere participation (Calhoun, 1997; Habermas, 1989). While prior studies on the radio station have been conducted (Mhlanga, 2006; Hart, 2006; 2011), this is the first research to exclusively focus on the relationship between X-K FM and its listeners in relation to HIV/AIDS dynamics in the Platfontein settlement. Mhlanga examined governance of the station and Hart focused on audience reception, whilst Tyali (2012) studied stakeholder participation in health messaging. The high incidence of HIV/AIDS at Platfontein was assessed by a different study (Miti, Letsaolo, Greehy & Mpongose, 2011), while additional work on responses to HIV messages via print media has been done (Dicks, 2015; Grant & Dicks, 2014).

1. BACKGROUND & LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Platfontein: The !Xun and Khwe

Platfontein is located on the outskirts of Kimberley in the Northern Cape Province of the Republic of South Africa. The small township is situated adjacent to the province's biggest black township, Galeshewa, and was a special project of land redistribution under the former Department of Land Affairs. The township was established to accommodate a group of two San communities that had been landless after being evicted as a result of a successful land-claim process by the Batlhaping (BaTswana) group, which had been removed from this land by the apartheid government decades earlier (Robbins, Madzudzo & Brenziger, 2001). Platfontein is inhabited by two communities, namely the !Xun and Khwe, and number about 6 500 residents in total. The languages spoken are !Xun, Khwe, and Afrikaans. These two sets of ethnic communities had no traditional connections with each other, with Platfontein, Kimberley, the Northern Cape or even South Africa. The !Xun had originally relocated from Angola, and the Khwe from Namibia, Caprivi and Angola. Both groups were recruited by, and assisted, the South African Defence Force (SADF) in its 1980s war against the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and its allies in Namibia and southern Angola (Robbins, 2004).

The SADF needed trackers for its operations that were based in Namibia and Angola and therefore recruited – sometimes forcefully – from these communities. A generation of !Xun and Khwe communities is said to have been born and raised in the army camps created by the SADF (Robbins, 2004). With the independence of Angola and later Namibia, some of the !Xun and Khwe soldiers and their families feared persecution as a result of their alliance with the SADF during the Border War (1976-1989). These communities opted to relocate to South Africa and were initially located in the Schmidtsdrift military base in the Northern Cape (Robbins, 2004). With the Schmidtsdrift land being successfully claimed by the Batlhaping under the South African Land Reform Policy, the !Xun and Khwe were relocated to Platfontein through a successful acquisition of land and partnership with the South African Department of Land Affairs (Den Hertog, 2013; Robbins, 2004; Robbins *et al*., 2001). Platfontein therefore continues to be home for the !Xun and Khwe people who had become important respondents in the research study underpinning this article.

1.2 Participation in the practice of HIV/AIDS communication

This section considers the participatory role of stakeholders in devising HIV/AIDS communication messages that are directed at them via media platforms. Guy Bessette (2004) argues that effective communication should be a two-way process. The post-World War II period, however, set a precedent where communication was a top-down process based on the assumption that diffusion of technical knowledge through mass media would transform traditional societies into modern ones. Community participation means facilitating the active involvement of different community groups, together with the other stakeholders involved,

the development and research agents working with the community and decision-makers. Appropriate solutions to a community's problems must be based on the active participation of the end users, and should involve other stakeholders working with the communities (Bessette, 2004). The research underpinning this article was concerned with the participatory mode of communication, and examined the extent of participation in HIV/AIDS health content production and reception by community members. The intersection of the radio medium and health communication is likely to contribute to vibrant and dynamic developments that will endure for many years, as radio retains a pre-eminence in the media of "developing" countries, as well as experiencing a renaissance in those of the "developed" world (see also, Tyali, 2012).

The objective of the research was to analyse the Platfontein community's involvement in the challenge of averting the spread of HIV, and solving other related challenges through community-based communication strategies. UNAIDS (2010) argues that people living with HIV and affected by the AIDS epidemic must be central in the process of effective HIV responses to ensure a rights-based sustainable solution, and to hold national and global partners accountable.

1.3 Community radio in effective HIV/AIDS communication

This section discusses literature that pertains to the role of community radio in facilitating participation, and links this participation to HIV/AIDS communication. Participation as praxis does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it exists within communication practices or structures, one of which is development broadcasting. Furthermore, the community ownership of radio programmes and structures, in which participation is an interaction, flow and sharing of local knowledge and experiences, is central to development broadcasting practices (Manyozo, 2005). Key platforms that have been used for development broadcasting include community radio stations. Two main types of community radio stations exist, namely those serving a geographical community, and those serving a community of interest. A community of interest may be defined as a community having a specific, ascertainable common interest. This common interest is what makes such a group of people or a sector of the public an identifiable community. These common interests may vary from being institutional, religious or cultural, depending on the broadcast licensing conditions (Tacchi, 2003; Teer-Tomaselli, 2001).

One distinguishing feature of community media, including community radio, is that it allows citizens to be active in one of many (micro) spheres relevant to daily life, and to exercise their right to communicate (Carpentier, Lie & Servaes, 2008). Popular forms of participation in the media range from informal − letter writing, telephoning, e-mailing and casual conversations with the media services staff, to formal − government-sponsored community open meetings, such as reviews of community-funded activities and government-appointed community boards of supervisors from media services (Browne, 2005). The programmes of a community radio are based on audience access and participation and should reflect the special interests and needs of the community (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002). This is because community

radio stations do not exist for the mere purpose of broadcasting. Their mandate is mainly focused on development, using local communities to fulfil their objectives. A key feature of community radio is the involvement of communities through a participation processes in the structure known as a community radio (Moyo, 2012). In the context of this article, the question of how XK-FM can be described as a community radio station has been answered by Mhlanga (2009). He argued that the facility should not be seen as a community radio station in the strict sense, but that it should rather be classified as a community radio under the auspices of the public broadcaster. This is a novel development in the global order of community radio. It buttresses the argument of Banda (2006; Berger, 1996) that, across the globe, there seems to be some definitional elasticity in how community radio should be conceptualised and structured. Banda indicated that we are faced with a situation where alternative definitions of community radio are coming to the fore. X-K FM therefore represents such an alternative definition in the on-going discourse of the global (re)conceptualisation of community radio.

In South Africa, radio programming for community broadcasting is to a large extent defined by the Broadcasting Act of 1999, as it must relate to, and be influenced by, the needs of the communities served (Fourie, 2001). Community stations become important because they are widely seen as an act of participation in the process of community creation (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001). This article, however, also cautions against the lack of consensus on the definition of the word "participation" (also see White, 1994). The article addresses this challenge by examining the research results, using the Habermasian concept of the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas (1989) defined "public sphere" as a virtual or imaginary community that does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space. In its ideal form, the public sphere is made up of private people gathered together as a public, and articulates the needs of society.

The importance of the public sphere lies in its potential as a mode of societal integration. Public discourse is a possible mode of coordination of human life (Calhoun, 1997). The research underpinning the article examined the openness of X-K FM as a notional public sphere that allows public discourse on and participation in HIV/AIDS communication by a beneficiary community. X-K FM is the first radio station of its kind in southern Africa that is owned and managed by the SABC, but works to advance the mandate of a community radio (Mhlanga, 2006; 2009). It caters exclusively to the two San communities of Platfontein in their respective languages (Open Africa, 2012). This radio station was initiated as a development project in partnership with the National Department of Communications under the then Minister of Communications, Dr Ivy Matsepe-Cassaburi (1999-2009 ministerial terms). By the year 2000, the station was operating with the backing of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) as a development project for the community of Schmidtsdrift (Mhlanga, 2006; 2009).

2. STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Newspapers, magazines, radio and television are some of the media that comprise the public sphere (Habermas, 1989; McQuail, 2000). Ideally, the concept implies that such media platforms

are open to all members of the society, as both receivers and senders of information. This requirement is, however, not always fully exercised, as participation in the public sphere is sometimes affected by more urgent factors. In South Africa, the high levels of inequality have prevented the majority of citizens from participating in the public sphere and making decisions at local levels that influence their daily lives (Wasserman & Garman, 2012). This observation could be very pertinent to the way in which X-K FM is used as a public sphere platform in Platfontein. The station is located in a very impoverished township. Prior research projects conducted at X-K FM assessed issues of governance, reception and content (Hart, 2006; 2011; Mhlanga, 2006; 2010), and the findings from these research projects formed the background of the study guiding this article.

The public sphere is a domain of social life in which public opinion can be formed and, possibly, where citizens deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion to express and publicise their views (McKee, 2005). Three types of public spheres exist: micro, meso and macro (Keane, 2004). Micro public spheres include spaces such as discussion circles, church spaces, as well as casual conversations among friends and acquaintances. Meso public spheres are described as those spaces of controversy about power. These encompass millions of people watching, listening or reading across vast distances. Macro public spheres include hundreds of millions of citizens, and are the consequence of the international concentration of mass media firms previously owned and operated at the nation-state level (Keane, 2004).

Criticism of the public sphere theory has been raised over the years. Some scholars have argued that the transformation of the public sphere is idealised, and exclusionary of other groups such as women, black people and homosexual people (Chiumbu & Ligaga, 2012). Squires (2002) argues that these marginalised communities have created coexisting counter-publics in reaction to the exclusionary politics of the dominant public sphere. Helge Rønning (1993), however, affirms the relevance and importance of the idea of the public sphere for the African continent, as it offers a conceptual arena for discussion and explains the nature of actual meeting places where discussion occurs. In their very essence, public sphere platforms, with their mandate to grapple with progressive dialogue, need to be inclusive in their very nature (Tyali, 2014) so as to avoid scenarios of "banking education" (Freire, 1970). Banking education is when knowledge is bestowed on those who are deemed to know less. This leads to people being constructed as passive recipients in the very process of education. In some societies, the concept of the public sphere needs to be contextualised in terms of the prevailing societal norms, power dynamics and lived cultures that are associated with that group of people. Therefore participation at X-K FM as a public sphere needs to be read in the context of the !Xu and Khwe cultures. The results of the study guiding this article explain how these two communities conceive participation in HIV/AIDS dialogue. Further research by Mhlanga (2006; Hart, 2006; 2011) illustrates that the radio station is a negotiated public sphere platform where interesting contradictions of power relations in the broadcast platform are negotiated. Such contradictions illustrate the nuance and divergent role of the radio station and its purpose of serving the community. This article further illustrates the problems that are associated with access, and the on-going battle to control the public sphere that exist in the form of X-K FM. Such battles are always endemic in discourse related to the public sphere.

The interest of this research was HIV/AIDS communication and community participation via broadcasting platforms such as X-K FM, and the theory of public sphere was adopted to assess participation at this micro spherical platform (Mhlanga, 2006). This theory was used to understand the level of community participation, how the community members participate, and why they participate in X-K FM.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of collecting data, the researchers situated the study in the qualitative research paradigm. This is a paradigm that attempts to increase our understanding of why things are the way they are in our social world and why people act the way they do (Hancock, 1998). Instead of drawing from a large, representative sample of an entire population of interest, qualitative researchers seek to acquire in-depth and intimate information about a smaller group of people. Another central aim of qualitative research is to learn about how and why people behave, think and make meaning as they do, rather than to focus on what people do or believe on a large scale (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detchner, 1995). The research underpinning this article drew meanings and conclusions from a group of people residing in Platfontein, who have direct contact with X-K FM. A case study format was applied, which entails a detailed and intensive understanding of a single case, by a combination of methods, such as document analysis, interviews, observation or participant observation – often resulting in thick descriptions (Bertrand & Hughes, 2000; Yin, 1994).

To collect the required data, the researchers visited the research site three times during the research process, spending an approximate combined period of one month at the research site. This period followed many prior visits over five years to the research site by different members of the UKZN research team conducting long-term studies at Platfontein, spanning a variety of topics (Nielsen & Tomaselli 2010; Barnabas, 2009; Dockney, 2011; Bodunrin, 2014). During the site visitations for the present study, the project researchers relied mainly on semi-structured interviews (in-depth and face-to-face), document analysis, as well as simple and partial participant observation to obtain data from the participants (Deacon, Murdock, Pickering & Golding, 1999). The interviews ranged from fully recorded to informal interviews with the content recorded in a daily diary. The formal interviews were held with a total number of eleven respondents. The details of the respondents are captured in the table below:

Table 1: The research participants and their respective roles within the community.

Name	Portfolio	Place	Gender
Linda Pieter	Senior Manager (X-K FM)	Platfontein	Female
Petrus Maroga	Community Member	Platfontein	Male
Kiet Verizile	Radio Producer (X-K FM)	Platfontein	Male
Reggie Kiringa	Community Member	Platfontein	Female
Ghumba Kiringa	Community Member	Platfontein	Male
Oscar Muringa	Community member	Platfontein	Male
Veka Katchorro	Community Member	Platfontein	Male
Reginald Muyenga	SASI/Community Member	Platfontein	Male
Piorro Hasjenda	Community Member	Platfontein	Male
Petrus Singa	Radio Producer (X-K FM)	Platfontein	Male
Zieka Hasjenda	Community Member	Platfontein	Male

NB: As part of the agreement with the research respondents, pseudonyms have been provided to protect the respondent's privacy.

Unstructured interviews were adopted as the best strategy for soliciting information from the respondents. The main objective of using such an interview strategy resulted from the need to obtain insight and depth into the topic being investigated, and to allow the respondent more freedom in responding in his or her chosen words (Du Plooy, 2001). When it comes to the criteria for selecting the research respondents, it should be noted that some of the interviewees were people who work for X-K FM and are engaged in designing HIV/AIDS communication messages. Therefore the people who work for the radio station were purposely selected. The radio employees were complemented by people who live in Platfontein, but do not work for the radio station. This second set of interviewees was randomly selected as we required information from people who are just ordinary residents of Platfontein. The objective was to gather responses from people who were designers of HIV/AIDS communication as well as recipients of HIV/AIDS communication messages in Platfontein.

4. FINDINGS

The results are outlined based on the two broad themes that emerged during the data-analysis process, namely i) partnerships for health communication participation, and ii) health communication initiatives.

4.1 Partnerships for health communication participation

One of the biggest challenges in HIV/AIDS communication programming is that community-level engagement is usually inadequate and too few people get to participate in sustained face-to-face programmes (Scalway, 2010). The central aim of this article is to understand the concept of beneficiary community participation in HIV/AIDS programming of broadcast media, using the case study of X-K FM. The proximity to its community makes this radio station a prime facility that could be used to facilitate engagement regarding matters of HIV/AIDS. Before participation could be assessed, the researchers used the available data in an attempt to understand the strategy employed at this radio station in communicating HIV/AIDS to the !Xun and Khwe people of Platfontein. Radio station employees stated that the strategy and policy of communicating about HIV/AIDS was at the discretion of the radio station. One participant from the station stated as follows:

> In the station we sit with the staff. We do have this meeting that we call Weekly Planning Session. It's held every Tuesday. The SABC will send us something – maybe you must broadcast about these problems. You must have a programme on your station about these issues. What we do, we give them the time and the slot and the day that suits us. In terms of having programmes from the community or anywhere else for the station, what we do is the presenters will come up with ideas. And then they will give this info to the producers. [*Linda Pieter (Female), Senior Manager: X-K FM*][1]

This indicates that the X-K FM team has limited influence on the programmes of the station. The policy control in terms of the content of the station is one of the key factors used by the researchers to determine whether the station could be defined as a community radio station. Other indicators that were used included participation in the content of the station, as well as the general community friendliness of the station. These indicators were derived from AMARC's (1998) definition of community radio. This definition notes that on a general level, community radio signifies a two-way process that entails the exchange of views from various sources and the adaptation of the media for use by communities (AMARC, 1998).

In relation to the main objective of the research, it was revealed that the station uses two forms of engagement processes when handling general broadcasting as well HIV/AIDS broadcasting measures:

> [...] what we do is if we do a programme in the station, we will contact the community leaders. We will talk to them, and maybe get two people from each. Two !Xun and two from Khwe. Come together and talk to them; what the problem is and how we can solve it. […] sometimes we do have feedback sessions from the community. We

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[1] To protect the identities of the research respondents, the arrangement made with the research respondents was that the researchers were to use pseudonyms in the process of reporting the research results.

do an OB [outside broadcast] at the school, where we invite the whole community and they will come talk to us about programmes and about music. How we can change it ... [*Kiet Verizile (Male), Radio Producer: X-K FM*].

This participant's comments suggest that the station's focus is not only on information dissemination, but that there is some process being followed to obtain feedback from the targeted communities. Therefore, the strategy of mass-directed information through the airwaves is complemented by the strategy of feedback sessions and outside broadcasting:

[...] we do have this information programme. It runs every day from 11:00 to 12:00. This is the programme where we broadcast information about HIV and AIDS. Sometimes we do pre-recording. We play pre-recorded stories and sometimes we invite those people to come and talk live. [*Linda Pieter (Female), Senior Manager: X-K FM*].

The method of an outside broadcast (OB) includes a procedure of conducting interviews with members of the community. These are conducted by the radio producers of the station; the process involves asking for permission to interview the community, and upon permission being granted by the potential interviewees, the recording process starts. These are normally conducted in the homes of the community members or, in the case of a group interview process, a suitable location is determined and agreed upon. The outside broadcasts cover a number of subjects that the station is dealing with, including HIV/AIDS. With regard to HIV/AIDS and other health-related topics, the station has mostly been working in partnership with the South African San Institute (SASI) Health and Culture Programme. Another advantage in the station conducting these interviews is that one of the station's radio producers had previously worked for the Red Cross organisation on health-related matters. Therefore, the transition to radio was smooth and allowed a sense of trust, as the community members are familiar with this producer. In addition, the station has kept recordings of HIV/AIDS communication interviews that have been done in the past. These were conducted with loveLife, and occasionally the station makes use of this when required:

People from loveLife were coming. They were talking on air. We were recording the stories they were talking about. We are still playing that on air. [*Linda Pieter (Female), Senior Manager: X-K FM*].

X-K FM has also developed a unique and affordable mechanism in receiving enquiries from listeners about its content. X-K FM has encouraged the community of Platfontein to write notes that are addressed to the station to ask for clarity on information, give general commentary, or lodge complaints. It is the responsibility of community members to deliver their notes at the entrance of the station where the security officer will collect them and hand them over to the producers. In the absence of airtime to contact the station, this practical arrangement has been designed to meet the needs of those individuals who are interested in participating in the content of the station. Where most conventional radio stations use telephones, text messages and, lately, social media to receive opinions from their target audiences, this is not

feasible at X-K FM, because most participants stated they could not afford airtime for these conventional engagement formats. Although there are identifiable weaknesses in the written note procedure of X-K FM, such as delayed communication and the risk that the feedback may not get the priority it requires, it can be concluded that the process is relatively cheap for people who cannot afford to make telephone calls to the radio station.

Some of the research participants, however, voiced reservations about the process of writing to the station. As the process requires the approval of the programme manager, there was concern that without his signature of approval a message might never be aired. This discretion of the programme manager was therefore cause for concern for participants, who felt that if the programme manager did not agree with the content of the written message, the message might never be heard on radio.

The researchers wanted to establish whether there was any community participation in HIV/ AIDS communication at X-K FM. The data suggested that there are initiatives by the station to involve communities in the broadcast content, including that of HIV/AIDS. Outside broadcasts and the innovative measures that have been designed to allow members of the communities to contribute to the station's content indicated that there was limited participation in the communication initiatives being conducted by the station (see the section on the theory of the relevance of public spheres in this article). In describing the relationship of the radio station with the community, it was revealed by a research participant working at the radio station that they had a good working relationship with the community of Platfontein:

> The relationship with the community is very open because we work for the community. So we cannot keep things close to our side. We get information outside, we broadcast it out to the community and the community listens to it. The community also sends us their stories or anything they have so that we can set it on air for the listener. [*Petrus Maroga (Male), Radio Producer: X-K FM*].

This sheds some light on a very important dimension in the question regarding the status of XK FM as a community radio attached to a public broadcaster (the SABC). Previous studies have dwelled on this dimension and the relationship of this community radio to the SABC (Hart, 2006; 2011; Mhlanga, 2006), about its classification as either a public broadcaster or a community radio station attached to a public broadcaster. The researchers have ascertained that the radio station can only be classified as a community radio by using the word "community" in a very loose sense; although the station has some participatory strategies in its programmes for the community, there are still various factors that make the station less of a community radio in the true definition of the word. This includes the fact that the employment policy at the station is at the discretion of the SABC, and that there seems to be no consultation with the communities about the appointment of staff at X-K FM:

> I was appointed in 2001, when the station was in Schmidtsdrift, as the first female presenter on air until 2005. Then the station manager passed away, and they [regional

SABC office] appointed me as the acting station manager, and ja, I was acting until 2006. For one year, and then the SABC appointed me as a trainee station manager. And I was that for six years, till the 1st of December [2011]. The SABC appointed me then as a station manager. [*Linda Pieter (Female), Senior Manager: X-K FM*].

It was also observed by the researchers (and later confirmed by some participants) that there seems to be a restriction in the main entrance to the station, as there is 24-hour security that controls access to the building. Furthermore, the overall content policy of the radio is still dictated largely by the SABC. These factors therefore make it impossible for the station to be classified as a true community radio in terms of the definition provided by AMARC (1998).

4.2 Health communication initiatives

Another basic aim of the authors of this article was to report on perspectives of the !Xun and Khwe communities on HIV/AIDS as a problem in their community. This is in contrast to most predominant development strategies that are largely modelled on the modernisation paradigm (Rogers, 2006). These development agents mostly enter as outsiders and make recommendations, without taking into account the perspectives of those that are being developed (Bessette, 2004). Except for a single participant who did not wish to comment on whether or not he "sees HIV/AIDS as a problem in Platfontein", all the participants identified HIV/AIDS as a huge burden on the community. As one participant observed:

> Ja, it [HIV] is a problem in the community. But you know, well actually it's a big disease, so people, as community members, people must go out there and talk to the community and tell them how to behave. Or we must get information on a daily basis to know that HIV is a disease that kills all the people. Most of the people have lost their parents and their loved ones. [*Kiet Verizile (Male), Radio Producer: X-K FM*].

As indicated by the literature, HIV/AIDS is one of many health and social challenges faced by most communities in South Africa (Botha & Durden, 2003; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). During the interviews, the participants mentioned challenges in addition to the problem of HIV/AIDS. It was stated by some participants that government's response to poverty and unemployment among HIV-positive individuals in the form of social welfare grants may be a contributing factor to the increase and prevalence of HIV in the community. As one informant stated:

> In my personal view, what I see that is making this [HIV] big is the government grants. I spoke to the nurses one day and they told me that it's [HIV] getting worse because young people will go to the clinic to tests themselves [for HIV] and when the results come and say its negative, they will go like, "No, no, no I must have it [HIV and AIDS] to have the social grant or the government money". And you see, they will go out and do everything they can to have the disease so that they test positive and get the government pension. [*Linda Pieter (Female), Senior Manager: X-K FM*].

This comment signals a problem with how government's HIV/AIDS welfare grant system has been communicated to poor communities in South Africa, such as Platfontein. Whereas the grant is intended to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS among other things (Booysen, 2004), it seems that potential unintended consequences have been noted in impoverished communities such as Platfontein. The welfare grant money was not the only social determinant associated with HIV/AIDS by the research participants. Because there is extensive evidence showing the linkages between alcohol abuse and HIV/AIDS, the researcher included questions about the level of alcohol consumption in the community. Asked whether alcohol consumption was an issue for his community, one of the participants stated as follows:

> Ja, it [alcohol] is here, too. Because some of them are unemployed. They don't have things to do and this is why they end up in alcohol. [*Kiet Verizile (Male), Radio Producer: X-K FM*].

According to the HIV/AIDS Media Project (2012), excessive alcohol consumption has an impact on HIV prevalence in three ways: i) HIV infection: Alcohol is said to impair decision-making and therefore abuse of alcohol may lead to unprotected or risky sexual behaviour; ii) HIV progression: Excessive alcohol use can speed up the disease progression, as it can compromise the immune system; and iii) HIV treatment: Excessive alcohol use may result in antiretroviral medication being taken irregularly, which could lead to the virus becoming drug resistant. The Health and Culture Programme that was run by SASI on behalf of the AIDS Foundation of South Africa in Platfontein seemed to make progress in terms of health promotion in Platfontein. This programme worked on the health and wellbeing of culturally vulnerable and marginalised populations in the country. It was funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy and involved 20 non-governmental organisations in South Africa.

Another challenge in the community mentioned by the research participants was that of inadequate use of family planning measures:

> I find it a problem because most of them [young mothers] don't finish school. Of course they must take care of the children. So it is a big issue here ... Most of the girls are not finished with school, they get married. [*Petrus Maroga (Male), Radio Producer: X-K FM*].

As explained by some research participants, another factor that could be encouraging adolescent pregnancies in the community is the welfare grant benefits allocated to South African parents with no or low income. Continuous research in this area is being undertaken, and some studies have disputed the relationship between social welfare grants and frequent teenage pregnancies in South Africa (Makiwane & Udjo, 2006).

Overall, it has been stated by the participants that the community views HIV/AIDS as a problem. This can be seen as a step towards addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS in Platfontein. As the problem and its related driving forces are identified, the people can direct their energy towards curtailing the spread of the virus in the community.

5.   CONCLUSION

Participatory communication can occur at micro, meso and macro levels simultaneously, as forms of discourse in the public sphere (or spheres). As a medium of public criticism, the public sphere can support, strengthen and change programmes of all kinds (Jacobson & Storey, 2004). This means that bodies such as X-K FM can support interpersonal and small-group communication, as well as township-level debates in a range of diverse matters, including HIV/AIDS discussions.

As a first step in answering the research question, the researchers examined extensive literature on matters pertaining to HIV/AIDS communication, participation and community radio. Following this, the article outlined the theory used to make sense of the research results and the research process.

The research participants stated that they have gained a sense of empowerment in dealing with the challenges regarding HIV/AIDS through X-K FM. This was because they saw value in adhering to the messages of prevention of and dealing with HIV/AIDS in general. It was stated that before the radio station broadcasts, there was a sense of confusion about the HI virus. Those who were not seeking public health services in the health clinic had no knowledge about the virus. It can therefore be concluded that the establishment of the radio station project by the SABC and the Department of Communications has helped to disseminate knowledge and elucidate some of the complexities of HIV/AIDS. However, there is still concern about the HIV/AIDS in the township. As stated by the research participants, the virus continues to pose a huge challenge to the community of Platfontein. The research participants voiced opinions that more remains to be done to mitigate the impact of the virus. Some participants raised concerns that messages on the virus are still not being taken seriously by the target audience. There are a number of reasons that can be put forward in this regard. HIV/AIDS is a complex problem that cannot be understood in isolation. This is because there are a number of social determinants driving the spread of the virus. These were clearly observed in the community, with participants citing examples such as poverty and the misuse of alcohol.

The radio station is playing a recognisable role in the objective of bringing about an HIV/AIDS-free Platfontein. X-K FM as a radio station has undertaken different strategies in communicating on HIV/AIDS. These include conducting and recording interviews to allow community voices in the dialogue of HIV/AIDS. This article concludes that the type of community participation in the station in terms of HIV/AIDS has mainly incorporated community voices through a programme format known as outside broadcasting. This process is carried out by the programme producers at the radio station, in a format that includes relaying an arrangement of these recordings and subsequent discussions on matters of concern relating to HIV/AIDS to the community. It should be noted, therefore, that the type of participation in these programmes by the station does not include the communities having an input in the arrangement of the programmes for broadcasting. This is the prerogative of the station employees. However, it should be kept in mind that that the employees of the station are members of the community of Platfontein. They represent a section of the !Xun and the Khwe community. Therefore, by virtue of being members of the two communities, these employees of the station characterise a form of representation of and participation by the community.

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