Despite numerous national campaigns and millions of dollars spent on education and health services, HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in Tanzania remain at epidemic levels. Research has shown that it is important for anti-HIV initiatives to target the country’s most vulnerable and high-risk populations who contribute disproportionately to the spread of the illness.

But what are the best ways for public health professionals to deliver information about HIV prevention to these populations? Using the 2010 AudienceScapes survey of Tanzanians as a guide, the following key guidelines emerge:

- Development practitioners need to focus on the communication mediums that target groups use most often and also trust. Radio, particularly locally operated stations, fulfills both of these criteria.

- A large proportion of Tanzanians across the country said they have access to, and discuss health issues with, doctors. However, only a small proportion said they have discussed HIV/AIDS with a doctor. This points to the need for increased outreach to clinics and hospitals to encourage health professionals to proactively inform their patients about HIV/AIDS, particular among high-risk patients.

- While most respondents claimed to receive a sufficient amount of information about HIV/AIDS prevention, the illness also topped the list of health issues that many Tanzanians want to know more about. This suggests a case of improper messaging, whether it be ineffective framing of the issue or the use of inappropriate communication mediums, and the need for improved message testing.
The national prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in Tanzania is 6.2 percent, which is high compared to its East African neighbors. Over the past decade, the overall infection rate has generally stabilized, but in the past five years the rate has risen in a few predominantly rural provinces. High-transmission areas such as trading centers, border towns and transport routes have disproportionately fueled the HIV/AIDS epidemic, spreading to the general population. For example, the Mbeya region is a transport hub between the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam and the Zambian border, and has one the highest HIV prevalence rates in the country. Similarly, it has been reported that migratory and seasonal farm workers in the agricultural regions of Iringa and Morogoro have an HIV prevalence of up to 30 percent. The capital city of Dar es Salaam has the second highest rate of infection at around 9 percent behind that of Iringa province.

Here we will use AudienceScapes data to provide examples of how it can be used to target vulnerable populations in these three provinces as well as nationally.

General media and ICT use in Tanzania mirrors that of the rest of East Africa. Radio continues to dominate as the go-to source for news and entertainment for the population, with television remaining a luxury for those outside major urban centers. The large majority of TV viewers outside of Dar es Salaam watch outside the home. In most provinces, less than half of TV viewers reported watching from home. Overall, the importance of television as a source for either news or health communication increases in areas like the capital where weekly TV viewership is twice the national average.

Over the past decade, an increasing number of African radio stations have programmed call-in shows to engage directly with listeners on myriad topics – including health, notably by making health experts
available to answer audience questions on an anonymous basis. Ninety-five percent of weekly radio
listeners in Tanzania said they have listened to call-in shows and 9 percent of this group said they
have called in to one of these shows at least once in the past year. In Iringa and Mbeya provinces, 16
percent and 12 percent, respectively, of weekly listeners said they have called in to such a show.
Listeners in these areas also tend to favor community and regional-level stations. Note that it is also
radio that garners the highest marks for trustworthiness as a source of news and information (Figure
3.2).

The survey results indicate that HIV/AIDS information is not in short supply. Nationally and in each
province, more than half of respondents said they had received information about HIV/AIDS within the
past day. More than three quarters of all respondents said they had received information in at least the
past week. Despite this apparent availability of information, HIV/AIDS also emerged as the leading
health topic that respondents said they would like more information about (there was significantly
variability for other health topics). This points to a strategic problem with HIV/AIDS messaging, either
ineffective framing of the issue or the use of inappropriate communication medium.
Seventy-eight percent of all respondents said they have access to a doctor whenever they need one. In addition, 74 percent said they discuss health issues with doctors. However, far fewer respondents listed doctors as a source for “useful information” on HIV/AIDS. High-risk groups such as urban men and rural young adults (15-24) were some of the least likely to cite doctors as a source for useful information. This points to the need for increased outreach to clinics and hospitals to encourage health professionals to proactively inform their patients about HIV/AIDS, particularly among high-risk patients.
The considerable efforts of the Tanzanian Commission for HIV/AIDS over the past decade have accomplished a great deal to reduce infection rates in some high-risk provinces like Mbeya. However, new areas of concern have emerged in the country’s rural provinces. Looking forward in how best to counter this new trend, the AudienceScapes national survey shows that Tanzanians in general are not lacking information about HIV and AIDS. Yet, respondents voiced a substantial need for further information on the topic. Therefore, it is key that development practitioners work to hone their messages and use communication techniques that can provide simple yet nuanced information about the topic. Radio stands out as the obvious medium in which to share information on a national and regional scale and health professionals themselves seem to be an underutilized source for preventing the spread of and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

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Ibid.