



Independent observer
of the Global Fund

DREAMS PrEP Ambassador Zimbabwe **Tanyaradzwa Makotore.**

*"Health communication must resonate
with the realities of the people we serve."*



From Mines to Medicine: How Tanyaradzwa Makotore is Transforming Health Communication in Zimbabwe with Grassroots Innovation and Cultural Sensitivity

A Journey of Innovation and Resilience; Insights from a Trailblazer in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Advocacy

Tanyaradzwa Makotore's journey from metallurgical engineering and mining safety to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) advocacy is a testament to the power of passion and purpose. Initially focused on industrial safety, Tanyaradzwa transitioned to SRHR after witnessing firsthand the dire need for better health services in underprivileged communities. Her shift was driven by a deep-seated desire to make a meaningful impact on individuals' lives, particularly in addressing the challenges faced by marginalized groups. In Zimbabwe, where health infrastructure often struggles to keep up with demand, the need for effective health advocacy is critical. Tanyaradzwa's shift from engineering to SRHR advocacy is not just about personal evolution; it's a reflection of a broader need for passionate individuals to step into roles where they can make a tangible difference. Her journey highlights the essential role that personal motivation and dedication play in addressing public health challenges.



Tailoring Messages to Local Needs

Zimbabwe is a nation rich in cultural diversity, and health communication strategies must navigate this complexity to be effective. Adapting global health messages to resonate with diverse local audiences is a critical aspect of Tanyaradzwa's work. She emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural nuances and varying levels of health literacy. For instance, in regions where traditional beliefs significantly influence health practices, incorporating local languages and culturally relevant analogies has proven effective in enhancing message acceptance and comprehension. By doing so, Tanyaradzwa's initiatives ensure that health messages are not only heard but understood and embraced by the community.

One standout example of Tanyaradzwa's grassroots success involved a local initiative in a remote village where traditional health services were virtually non-existent. In order to traverse the complexity of having locals who speak different languages, a total of 16 in Zimbabwe, they opted to train local community volunteers who could speak in the respective vernacular and being from the community were more readily accepted by the target beneficiaries both young and old. By leveraging community leaders and integrating local customs into health messaging, the initiative dramatically increased engagement and service uptake. Given the challenge of translating a number of English terminologies used in the health sector,

Tanyaradzwa introduced the concept of Video Screening to the National AIDS Council, an approach she learnt of from her visit to a Health Communication Conference held in Rwanda. This enabled them to focus on creating educational videos through film and art that ensured the message reached home. Key to this success was the effort to make health information relatable and culturally sensitive, ensuring that the community felt ownership and trust in the program. This initiative ensured that the rural community

was not locked out from current health issues discussed at national and global levels.



Tackling HIV/AIDS Stigma an overcoming barrier to access

Addressing the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS remains a central challenge in Tanyaradzwa' advocacy work. The stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS can often prevent individuals from seeking necessary care and support. Her strategy involves direct community engagement and educational campaigns that demystify the disease and humanize those affected. Successful messaging often includes personal stories from individuals living with HIV, which helps to dismantle myths and foster empathy within the community.

Tanyaradzwa identifies several barriers to accessing HIV services for young people, including stigma, misinformation, and logistical issues. Her approach involves using targeted communication to dispel

myths, provide accurate information, and improve service accessibility. For instance, mobile technology has been a game-changer. By using mobile platforms, Tanyaradzwa' initiatives have improved the dissemination of information and increased access to services. This approach helps bridge the gap between health services and young people who might otherwise face significant barriers to accessing care. Additionally, partnerships with local organizations have been crucial in addressing these challenges and ensuring that services are available and accessible. By collaborating with local organizations and leveraging mobile technology, her initiatives have made significant strides in overcoming these obstacles.



Incorporating Community Feedback

In Zimbabwe, as is the case in most African countries, access to stable electricity and internet is a dream! This forces one to think outside the box and effectively use available resources. Incorporating community feedback into health communication strategies is essential for effectiveness. Tanyaradzwa highlights the importance of listening to the communities served and adapting strategies based on their input. An example of this put into action was heavily relying on radio to campaign targeting youth, where initial feedback revealed a disconnect between the health messages and the realities faced by young people. This is reflected in the current state in Zimbabwe whereby statistics show that a staggering 80% of HIV and STDs recorded cases occur to youths between the ages of 15-24 years. Tanyaradzwa attributed this mainly to “Age of Access” being a major setback. She described this term as the case where in Zimbabwe, it is basically regarded as illegal for individuals below 18 years of age to openly access vital health services such as contraceptives, condoms or even gynecologist services. This has created a major stigma leading to the fast growing degradation in the health of the young generation. In response, the campaign was adapted to include more interactive and youth-focused elements, through the use of social media mainly WhatsApp that is easily accessible and offers some degree of privacy. This adjustment not only improved engagement but also made the messages more relevant and impactful.

Tanyaradzwa has pioneered media collaborations with outlets such as Radio Zimbabwe, Power FM and National FM whose audience cut across the whole country reaching into the rural roots. This has aided in the success of the campaign tenfold, which is measured through a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators. Tanyaradzwa utilizes metrics such as service uptake rates, engagement through likes and posts and most importantly changes in community attitudes. These indicators help assess the impact and effectiveness of communication strategies, guiding future improvements.

Learning from Failure

Not all campaigns achieve their intended outcomes. Tanyaradzwa recalls from experience that during COVID most of the target audience was stuck in the house with little to no movement. It goes without saying that this was one of the most tragic times faced globally, however, if we are to draw some positive from this adversity, it relatively helped the campaign as most people were glued to their mobiles! Come post COVID time, things slowly but surely got back to normal, and this made running a campaign heavily relying on screen interactions challenging. This forced Tanyaradzwa and her team to re-strategize to ensure community engagement and adaptability, leading to more inclusive and responsive strategies in subsequent efforts. They were forced to minimize online interactions which used to form 2-3 hours at time to at most 1 hour to ensure that they maintain their audience's focus. They also moved their training sessions from the weekdays to weekends and/or in the evenings as this is when most people were free to participate and contribute meaningfully.



Effective Global Health Communication Strategies

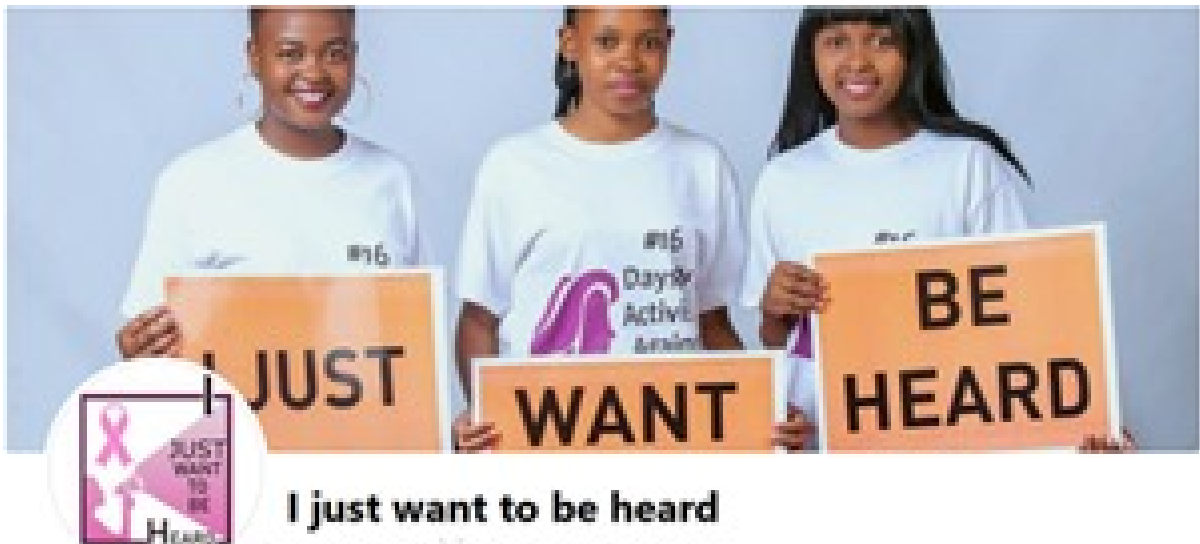
On a macro level, Tanyaradzwa identifies transparency and adaptability as key elements of successful global health communication. Strategies that are flexible and responsive to emerging trends and regional challenges tend to be more impactful. Her work emphasizes the need for clear, actionable messaging that addresses both global and local concerns.

One of the significant challenges in global health messaging is maintaining urgency and relevance across diverse regions. Tanyaradzwa notes that varying levels of infrastructure and cultural contexts require tailored approaches to effectively communicate the urgency of health issues like HIV/AIDS. In Zimbabwe, this means adapting global messages to fit local needs and ensuring that they resonate with the unique circumstances of different communities.

Impact of Digital Media and Importance of Partnerships

The rise of digital media has transformed global health communications by increasing reach and engagement. Tanyaradzwa has embraced digital platforms to disseminate information quickly and interactively, thus broadening the scope of her advocacy efforts and reaching new audiences.

Partnerships with governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders are crucial for amplifying communication efforts. Tanyaradzwa highlights a successful partnership with NGOs such as My Vision Initiative and She Awakens Movement, to name a few, that played a key role in enhancing the reach and impact of an HIV awareness campaign. By pooling resources and expertise, such partnerships can significantly boost the effectiveness of health initiatives and ensure that they reach the intended audiences. Tanyaradzwa has also founded her very own initiative on facebook called [I just want to be heard](#) where she works closely with Zimbabwe Health Interventions funded by USAID.



Engaging Young People

Involving young people in global health communication is vital for creating sustainable change. Tanyaradzwa advocates for youth-led initiatives and inclusive strategies that empower young people to take an active role in health advocacy. These include the use of music, films and art to include youth-focused campaigns and platforms that resonate with their experiences and aspirations.

Tanyaradzwa is leading the charge in reshaping health communication in Zimbabwe and beyond. Her efforts underscore the importance of adaptability, community involvement, and the power of effective communication in overcoming health disparities and driving meaningful change.

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