



Commonwealth
Foundation

Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF5) Workshop: Culture-based methods for effective HIV and AIDS prevention – what role can distance learning play?

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THE COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION

The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental organisation working to help civil society organisations promote democracy, development and cultural understanding in Commonwealth countries. The Foundation currently works in three programme areas; Culture and Diversity, Sustainable Development and Governance and Democracy.

RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

Today there are over 40 million people living with HIV and AIDS worldwide, and 20 million of this number live in the Commonwealth. Through its Sustainable Development Programme, the Commonwealth Foundation spearheaded the development of the Pan-Commonwealth Civil Society Network on HIV and AIDS in 2006. This network links people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS and enables civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage with and address key issues in dealing with the pandemic across the Commonwealth. Feedback from network members indicates that accessible prevention and advocacy initiatives that have employed a range of approaches, such as traditional music, community radio and street theatre, to communicate its prevention messages have proven to be particularly successful in engaging communities. For example, in India, street theatre has become an especially successful vehicle for HIV prevention, with performances drawing large audiences, and with the license to tackle normally forbidden topics.

Given the compelling evidence from studies conducted around the Commonwealth and in many different cultures that formal methods of training are not always appropriate, the effectiveness of culturally sensitive indigenous methods of engagement need to be promoted when addressing HIV and AIDS awareness and prevention. Through such an informal methodology the potential to draw entire communities into sustained conversations that may save lives should indeed be further explored.

Such work forms part of a general context in which culture is increasingly being recognised as the fourth pillar of development. Culture-based tools and interventions offer a key method for advancing agendas around development and governance and have a potentially central but still somewhat unexplored role to play. Through its work in its Culture and Diversity Programme, the Foundation is, inter alia, supporting the use of cultural actions towards development and governance objectives and, as such, is encouraging clearer connections between its work in diversity, development and democracy.

One example of this emerging work is the Foundation's new interactive CD-Rom toolkit, the Commonwealth Culture Toolkit, launched at the 2007 Commonwealth People's Forum in Kampala, Uganda, and distributed widely since. The Culture Toolkit is designed to encourage the sharing of cultural and culture-based work between Commonwealth countries, focusing particularly on the connection between culture and development.

This workshop will build on the initiatives and innovations outlined above, while looking to ways of maximising the role that distance and open learning can play in encouraging greater use of such methods.

OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The workshop will focus on the effectiveness of employing traditional, indigenous and culture-based modes of engagement with communities to promote effective HIV and AIDS prevention. It is intended to stimulate discussion on how these methods can be shared more widely, replicated and scaled up, and in particular, the role distance learning can play in promoting the greater adoption of culture-based methods in addressing the challenges posed by HIV and AIDS, and what is required for this.

Expected outcomes:

- Extend learning about good practice in culture-based approaches to prevention
- Develop continuing networks for international sharing and foster links between those working in HIV and AIDS and those working in culture and development.
- Increase recognition of the importance of documentation and dissemination of practice, and of mainstreaming distance learning as part of this.
- Share innovative approaches of training with others to encourage wider adoption, and set up systems for long-term distance learning in this sphere.

WORKSHOP FORMAT AND PROPOSED AGENDA

The workshop will begin with a panel discussion and will include speakers drawn from the Commonwealth Foundation's Pan-Commonwealth Civil Society Network on HIV and AIDS – one from each of the Commonwealth's developing regions: Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The panel members will have experience in using culture-based methods of HIV and AIDS prevention, complemented by others with experience of employing other cultural forms of communication in promoting development initiatives, and in distance learning.

As well as the presenters, participants from Commonwealth High Commissions in London will be invited to participate, thereby ensuring that the workshop has an element of cross-sectoral learning between civil society and government.

Using a case study approach, each speaker will share experiences of how cultural initiatives have been employed to engage with issues related to HIV and AIDS. In addition, demonstrations of the work will be shown, e.g. enactments of street theatre, videos of music performance. Presenters will be asked to put forward key points of learning from their experience and analyse potential replicability.

A roundtable discussion will follow, and after this participants will break out into smaller groups to analyse learning from the case studies that were presented and address some of the following questions:

- How can organisations make greater use of culture-based actions to promote HIV and AIDS prevention?
- What is the best way to encourage a network of sharing and long-term learning?
- How can those working in marginalised and isolated areas have better access to information and practical knowledge?
- What are further innovative, accessible and integrated approaches that can be used to reach affected groups?
- How can these methods be scaled up and what roles can open and distance learning play in this?

- Where do the major gaps still lie and what support is needed from the Commonwealth and other institutions to address this?

Recommendations based on group discussions will be put forward by each group and areas for follow up will be identified.

Proposed agenda

The workshop will run for 180 minutes, as follows (based on a putative 10:00 start time):

10:00 Welcome and purpose of the workshop – Dr Mark Collins, Director, Commonwealth Foundation

10:10 Panel presentations and demonstrations (10 minutes each)

- Civil society representative: Africa
- Civil society representative: Asia
- Civil society representative: Caribbean
- Civil society representative: Pacific

10:50 Roundtable discussion and questions

11:20 Breakout groups – consider key questions and develop recommendations for follow-up

12.30 Presentation of recommendations from breakout groups and discussion

12:50 Summing up and closing remarks – Anisha Rajapakse and Andrew Firmin, Commonwealth Foundation

OUTPUTS

The report that emerges from this workshop will be disseminated through the Commonwealth Foundation's Pan-Commonwealth Civil Society Network on HIV and AIDS as well as used to support the Foundation's emerging work in promoting cultural expression to pursue development and governance goals. The Foundation will follow-up on recommendations as appropriate through its ongoing work to support the Network and through targeted grant-making.

A presentation to High Commissioners may also be made, informing them of the outcomes and encouraging them to adopt appropriate policies to support this work further.