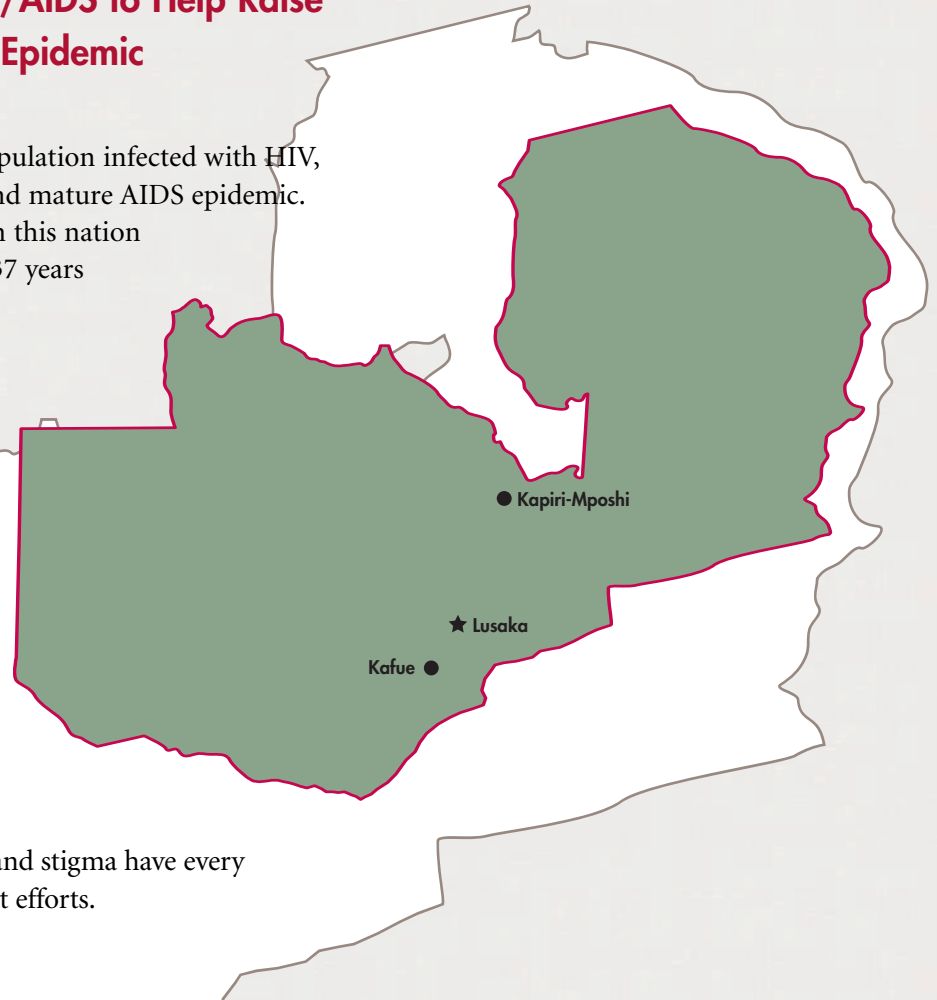


Telling Stories of Life and HIV/AIDS in Zambia

Improving Media Coverage of HIV/AIDS to Help Raise Public Awareness about Zambia's Epidemic

With more than 16 percent of the adult population infected with HIV, Zambia is in the midst of a full-blown and mature AIDS epidemic. HIV/AIDS has caused average life expectancy in this nation of 11.3 million people to plummet from 60 to 37 years and the impacts of the virus have permeated virtually every aspect of life. There is no doubt about it—AIDS is a story that demands news coverage.

HIV/AIDS is a subject that must be covered with accuracy and sensitivity, yet very few professional education and training opportunities exist for reporters in Zambia. Organizations and associations that support development in the field of journalism are equally hard to find. The unfortunate result is that potentially life-saving information about HIV/AIDS is not making its way to the people who need it. And—without accurate information—myths, misconceptions, and stigma have every opportunity to impede prevention and treatment efforts.



“We met with experts who shared the latest research on the disease as well as people living with the virus who told us their side of the story and how we—as media professionals—can help. I learned how to give HIV/AIDS stories a human face and to write and report with empathy because I gained a deeper understanding of the issue during class sessions.”

—Inutu Himanje, national television reporter for ZNBC TV,
interviewing an HIV-positive woman in Kafue



Photo: Courtesy of Suzanne Marmion

“We’ve been grappling with our AIDS epidemic for 20-plus years and it might seem like we’ve heard it all, but we can’t let up in terms of communicating about HIV/AIDS because HIV has not let up on humanity.”

—Mulenga Kapwepwe, a playwright and HIV/AIDS and culture expert working for Zambia’s National Arts Council who spoke at the media trainings, urging journalists to cover the epidemic more effectively



Photo: Courtesy of Suzanne Marmion

Working with the Zambia Institute of Mass Communication Educational Trust (ZAMCOM), the HIV/AIDS Twinning Center facilitated two media capacity-building workshops in July-August 2005. Funded by the Public Affairs Section of the United States Mission in Zambia through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, these workshops were designed to improve timely, accurate news coverage of HIV/AIDS-related topics thereby increasing public awareness about the country’s epidemic, effective methods of prevention, and treatment and support options currently available to those already living with the virus.

Conducted by ZAMCOM with technical support and reference materials provided by the Kaiser Family Foundation’s International Health Journalism Program, each two-week workshop brought 30 media professionals from cities and towns throughout Zambia to the nation’s capital of Lusaka, where during the first week they met with key national experts on HIV/AIDS and people living with or affected by the virus. Two US journalists with distinguished careers covering health-related news—Phil Hilts and Suzanne Marmion—served as faculty for the workshops, helping the Zambian journalists improve their reporting skills through hands-on training and challenging them to look for innovative ways of telling stories about Zambia’s AIDS epidemic.

The participants put what they learned to use during the second week of the workshops when they traveled outside Lusaka to the towns of Kafue and Kapiri-Mposhi to conduct interviews and shoot footage for the stories they would soon tell. For many of the journalists, these trips represented their first opportunity to go out into the field to gather information and witness first-hand the devastating impact poverty and HIV/AIDS are having on individuals, families, and entire communities.

When the media professionals returned to Lusaka, they set to work on their stories using ZAMCOM’s equipment and production facilities. Most of them acknowledged that what they learned during the workshops had energized them, giving them a renewed commitment to reporting on HIV-related issues in a sensitive, ethical, and informative manner. With upwards of 80 stories already broadcast on radio and TV and more than 30 articles published in newspapers and magazines, the workshops have effectively met the goal of increasing accurate, timely media coverage of Zambia’s HIV/AIDS epidemic.

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