**Campaigns** fail to **stop Aids**

**Media and Church asked to**

**lend more pro-active hell!**

**By Churchill Otieno**

Managers of campaigns against

the spread of Aids gave been

forced to change strategies as

achieved so far fall short of

the desired goal.

Despite virtually all Kenyans

knowing that Aids is deadly and

incurable, many are contracting it

,daily in a relentless and lethal

merry-go-round. The dust in its

wake are rising death figures.

Health authorities in the campaign

are calling in reinforcements, and already they are beckoning

to the media and Church to

playa bigger role. The mission is

to sell ideas that would change the

society's risk -prone behaviours.

-A recent media workshop in

Homa bay's Hippobuck Hotel

heard that since the scourge set in,

journalists had so far done a commendable

job, pushing awareness

levels to beyond 90 per cent of the

population. But it is fast dawning

that awareness is not all it takes to

arrest the determined spread of the

virus.

The new strategy is to go beyond

alerting the masses of the

disease and how its spreads. It

seeks to help people, especially

those, at high risk, to change various

behaviours.

The Church is being reminded

that its congregation comprises

families, which unfortunately are

suffering a serious blow from the

scourge. The Church therefore

faces the choice of letting its faith take the brunt or actively intervene by exhorting moral uprightness

through sermons. The

Church is being asked to climb

down to reality and not mislead itself

that its followers are perfect.

Available statistics depict telling

facts. Over 90 per cent of Kenyans

are aware of the disease and

how it spreads but only 46 per

cent believe they face risks of getting

it.

Aids flourishes among women

of 20-25 years and men of 25-35

years old. It also targets youth below

24 years, who account for 70

per cent of all Aids cases in the

country. Young girls are also

more vulnerable. For instance, in

Nyanza Province, an average of

34 per cent of girls start engaging

in sex at 14-15 years.

During the media workshop attended

by 40 journalists, resource

persons made a case for the media

to cease "merely reporting from

the periphery" but to get involved

in marketing messages that would

make readers, listeners and viewers

change their risky behaviours.

An official of The Futures

Group, a UK-based international

non-governmental organisation,

Mr Richard Odindo, said the media were now faced with an anti-

Aids challenge in the public interest:

"The Fourth Estate must now

engage in social marketing of its

contents to effect behavior

change. "

Mr Odindo. who is the Group's Co-ordinator,

gave a presentation on "Social

Marketing as a Strategy for Initiating

and Promoting Behaviour

Change. "

He defines social marketing

variously, one being "the use of

market techniques to generate discussion

and promote information,

attitudes, values and behaviours.

By doing so, it helps to create a

climate conducive to social and

behavioural change" .

"Social marketing makes use

of methods from the commercial

sector: setting measurable objectives,

doing market research, developing

products and services

that correspond to genuine needs,

creating demand for them through

advertising, and finally marketing

through a network of outlets at

prices that make it possible to

achieve the sales objectives," the

dictum goes, decidedly pure

commerce ..

Mr Odindo said the difference

between commercial and social

marketing was in their content and

goals but not in the methods they

use.

The strategy, he said, was not

utopian since campaigns for social

change were not a new.

"They have been waged from

time immemorial. Social campaigns

form an integral part of the

environment in industrial and developing

countries. They are often

prompted by the perception that

some situation represents a social

problem and merits social

action. "

Areas that have recently gained

from this approach, he said, include

health campaigns to reduce

smoking, drug abuse, nutrition,

immunisation and family planning

among others.

He recommended a more targeted

campaign, developed from

market and audience research

since social problems are complex

and interrelated. He argued that

solutions needed to be developed

in light of the specific socio-economic,

historical, religious, and

cultural frameworks. Often,

people who were particularly vulnerable

or exposed needed to be

identified and a campaign developed

targeting them.

Mr Odindo is against lumping

people together under the assumption

that they are "same". For instance

the youth include male and

female, urban and rural, and have

diverse cultural and religious traditions

among others all which affect

their sexuality.

He alluded that due to the prohibitive

cost of scientific market

research, most community-based

organisations could not afford it.

But they could compensate

through thorough review of available

materials, consult existing

market researches sponsored by

other organizations. An assessment

of the situation in the community

with the help of "key informants"

such as community leaders can be equally helpful.

But social campaigns should

not be conceived as forums to

educate or admonish.

He warned: "Some social campaigns

are designed merely to

help bring problem areas into the

open and draw attention to their

roots, which can often be a taboo

subject. Although Sharpening society's

awareness of a problem is

necessary, it is by no means sufficient

for bringing about changes

in societal attitudes and behavior,

as these are shaped by habits, interests,

feelings, and beliefs,

among other factors. "

Mr Odindo said the population

was even more complicated now

in so far as Aids was concerned

since there are people who have

adopted behaviour changes. There

is a second category of the population

who were "receptive but find

it difficult" to adopt a given

behaviour. A third category were

"receptive but think what you are

saying is not for them" and a

fourth one who are outrightly

against the changes being sold.

All the different categories

must be targeted individually because

they required different social

marketing goals. Ultimately,

the marketer must find ways to

make the adoption of new

behaviour easy. Hence, reducing

such costs and creating incentives

to adopt and maintain the new

idea or practice over time is a central

task of social marketing.

The workshop was organised

under the HIV Aids Prevention

and Care (HAPAC) project being

implemented jointly by the government

and the British Department

for International Development

(DFID). The project is being

managed by The Futures Group

International, UK.

Journalists and health specialists

at the workshop agreed the

Church could not afford to be an

impediment in the campaign

against the Aids spread. It was argued

that while religion had its

own guidelines on family life and

sexuality, very few faithful followed

those rules.

The Amref deputy country director,

Dr John Nduba, challenged

, the Church to take a role and stake

in the campaign against Aids or let

the scourge decimate families.

"Aids has come up while we

have had the Church; we are reacting

to it while we have the

Church. The Church must come to

get involved. It can't ignore it. In

Kenya, families are suffering terribly.

Families are disappearing

yet the family is the most sacred

institution. Whole families are

getting extinguished, " he added.

Dr Nduba said the spread of the

Aids virus was enhanced by increased

opportunities for people

of different age-groups to have

sex.

He said it was worrying that in

1996, Nyanza Province accounted

for 28 per cent of national Aids cases, a share which had by

December last year increased to

31 per cent.

Nyanza was leading nationally

at end of 1997. Other provinces

were Rift Valley (17.8%), Eastern

(12.4%), Central (11.6%), Western

(10.2%), Nairobi (9.3%),

Coast (6%) and North Eastern

(0.7%).

The Amref official said that

with Aids, kissing was as risky as

actual intercourse: "Kissing one

whose HIV status you don't know

is as dangerous as going to bed

with that person. Kissing hundreds of people is equal to having

sex with the same number of

people. "

Participants raised concern that

the government was contributing

towards further mystification of

the disease. The Ministry of

Health was accused of handling

Aids issues differently from how

it managed other killer diseases

such as cholera and ebola.

It was noted that when people

died of cholera or ebola, the

"whole government" went to that

village. "Why is that not so when

its Aids?" asked media practitioner Tervil Okoko.

The medical fraternity was

challenged that confidentiality

with Aids was highly counterproductive.

The workshop :was told

that under Sessional Paper No. 4

of 1997, medical doctors had a

duty to inform the public that one

died of Aids, especially those at

immediate risk of infection.

As health campaigners agonise

over why almost all Kenyans

know there is a danger, but

strangely believe the danger is not

for them, one is set thinking why

this scourge has never become a

serious political agenda.

An illustration showing instances of risky behaviour: Despite a high awareness level of Aids, behaviour

has not changed among Kenyans.