

Same same but different: ‘Talking HIV’ in the highlands

By Vanessa Achilles

Since 2001, UNESCO Bangkok has produced 13 soap operas for HIV and AIDS, non-traditional drug use and trafficking/unsafe migration prevention in ethnic minority languages. “While good information does not guarantee good choices, no information virtually guarantees bad choices”¹. Dealing with complex sensitive issues, such as health or legal advice, everybody prefers communicating in their own language. The UN agrees that the key priority in the field of HIV and AIDS is universal access. Universal access begins with universal access to information. Access is not limited to physical infrastructure, but also to the availability of linguistically and culturally appropriate messages.

Research shows that highland populations are disproportionately at risk of contracting HIV and AIDS and of being trafficked or exploited. However, prevention strategies rarely address their needs. UNESCO Bangkok’s Culture Unit developed a 12-step methodology for HIV and AIDS prevention targeting ethnic minorities living in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

The UNESCO Methodology was created to produce educational radio dramas in ethnic minority languages. Thirteen radio programmes have already been created by and for minority groups in Cambodia, China (Yunnan and Sichuan provinces), Lao PDR and Thailand. The methodology can easily be used to produce other types of visual materials, including theatre performances, videos or printed materials such as posters or brochures. It can also be used for other kinds of messages such as maternal child health, or malaria.

Culture matters to implement development programmes efficiently. “One size fits all” programmes will at best miss their target. UNESCO acts on these findings under its mandate to promote cultural diversity. This presentation introduces the methodology as well as innovative ways to respect the principles of cultural diversity.

¹ Dr. David Feingold