

Series 2 Evaluation

Background

South Africa is starting to recover after decades of strategic discrimination and enforced inequality. Though it is regarded as a middle income country, the majority of South Africans still live below the bread line and millions subsist in circumstances resembling the poorest countries in the world. National health statistics reflect the inequities of society, with large portions of the population suffering from preventable deaths and diseases. There is an urgent need to develop and expand health care facilities so that even the most marginalised people have access to adequate treatment. Simultaneously, it is important that people be educated about life-threatening diseases and health practices. Although there have been campaigns to spread knowledge, the backlog in resources and decades of poor education are difficult to eradicate.

There have been very few health education programmes aimed at challenging social attitudes and changing unhealthy behaviour patterns; Soul City set out to do precisely this - in an imaginative and entertaining way that would be accessible to a broad range of people.

Executive Summary

Soul City is a multi media "edutainment" strategy which has been running since 1992 and which aims to empower people and communities through the power of mass media. The first series of Soul City was aired in 1994, the second series in 1996, the third series in 1997. The fourth series was aired in 1999.

The ongoing Soul City strategy consists of five key elements:

Television Series

A 13 episode ½ hour television drama which is flighted at prime time (8pm) on SABC1. The show, called Soul City, has become one of the most popular programmes on television and has won the Avanti award for excellence in educational broadcasting two years in succession, and has won the SABC award for top programme. Soul City uses its dramatic power to impart health and development education messages.

Radio

The radio drama of the second series was called Healing Hearts and consists of 45 fifteen-minute episodes broadcast on eight different language stations and a further ten community radio stations. While the main messages are similar to those on the TV programme, the Healing Hearts was developed to appeal to more rural audiences.

Booklets / Newspapers

The Soul City campaign uses printed material to reinforce the broad messages conveyed by the electronic media, and to supplement knowledge with more detailed information. Three 34-page glossy booklets are developed each series and illustrated with characters from the television series. The booklets are serialised in two languages in 10 newspapers nationally and thereafter a total of 2.25 million booklets are distributed as inserts in these newspapers.

PR, Advertising and Advocacy

The public relations section includes a variety of activities intended to help popularise Soul City, as well as advocating for the particular health issues. Methods employed include the strategic release of articles about the particular health issues. A variety of competitions are run on the radio, television and through newspapers and magazines, encouraging healthy and community oriented behaviour, and each popularising the other media. There is a "search for a star" competition which looks for new actors to star in the next series of Soul City, and a Health Care Worker of the Year Competition.

Education packages

The mainstream media are effective vehicles for raising awareness and knowledge. Targeted and facilitated interventions amongst specific groups of people are even more effective. Soul City has built on the success of the mass media campaign, and developed packages for use in formal and informal education settings. Catering for adult education groups, and youth between the ages of 11 and 16 years these packages are based on the issues tackled by the Soul City mass media. They build on the stories in the mass media and are high quality materials. The adult pack consists of a comic with information pages, posters, a facilitators guide and audio tapes. The Lifeskills pack consists of a comic, workbooks and a facilitator's manual. This evaluation was performed in four representative sites around the country over a period of one year (1600 respondents, 20 focus groups and 15 in-depth interviews).

THE SOUL CITY PHILOSOPHY

Edutainment as a popular vehicle for social messages

It is widely acknowledged that media is an efficient and cost-effective way of reaching large, dispersed and often illiterate audiences. The vast majority of South Africans, even in marginalised and remote areas, have access to at least one form of mainstream media – approximately 92% of South Africans have access to radio, 71% to television and 17% read daily newspapers. Development and educational initiatives increasingly use the media in an effort to spread knowledge widely, and educational programmes abound. The use of entertaining programmes to empower people with knowledge, however, is a relatively new concept in South Africa. Soul City has pioneered this "edutainment" approach, contextualising educational messages within a dramatic genre.

There are a number of ways in which this approach serves the objectives of the Soul City campaign:

SOUL CITY OBJECTIVES

EDUTAINMENT FUNCTION

- Reach as many people as possible within a broad target market, while specifically focusing on youth and women in marginalised and remote communities. Some form of mainstream media exists in almost every home, no matter how rural. The entertainment function of the programme ensures broad appeal, reaching larger and more diverse audiences than conventional didactic education programmes.
- Generate discussion around health and lifestyle issues. Because of their entertainment value, the programmes are often viewed or listened to in social situations, increasing the possibility of spontaneous discussion.
- Encourage changing attitudes and behaviour in relation to certain diseases and health risks. This often starts with acknowledgement of personal risk. Serial dramas can provide audiences with role models and, as the drama unfolds, the characters can evolve in ways which challenge traditional conventions and beliefs. Drama enables the audience to identify with characters and their experiences, increasing the personal relevance of health issues.

Some key results from the evaluation

- 61% of all respondents were exposed to the Soul City media
- 57% of TV viewers saw Soul City TV
- 41% of radio listeners heard Soul City radio

- 37% of newspapers readers saw the Soul City booklets
- The multi-media vehicle was appropriate for reaching rural and urban areas, and was effective in reinforcing messages.
- The television programme was one of the most popular programmes on TV, and reached nearly two million people every week.
- The power of edutainment was borne out: Soul City's popularity was due to its accessibility, entertainment value, and the fact that it contained educational messages. 95% of people who were exposed to Soul City reported that they had learnt something from it.
- Over half of those who accessed Soul City discussed it afterwards with friends, family or at school.
- The most memorable messages were those dealing with HIV / AIDS, safe sex and smoking. Messages around TB, land and housing were less well remembered. This is partly due to the fact that they were dealt with less extensively than other issues.
- Knowledge about transmission of the HIV virus increased significantly - particularly among youth, the primary target group. There was a reported increase in condom usage after the intervention.
- Soul City also tackled the issue of prejudice towards AIDS victims, and successfully changed attitudes towards people with HIV / AIDS.
- The humorous way in which Soul City addressed the smoking issue captured the imagination of its audience. Much of the knowledge gained was around the issue of passive smoking and its harmful effects on children.
- There was an increase in awareness and knowledge about tuberculosis, and particularly about its symptoms and treatment. Soul City successfully conveyed the message that anyone can get TB.
- Storylines dealing with land and housing raised awareness of land reform programmes and processes for acquiring land.

The multi-media strategy

Soul City targets diverse groups ranging from metropolitan townships where access to television and newspapers is fairly common, to far-flung rural areas where many people only have access to radio. It is necessary to use a number of different media in order to ensure that messages reach the target audience.

While the mass media can be highly efficient in raising awareness and increasing knowledge, this alone does not necessarily result in changed attitudes and behaviour. However, the stronger the message, the more likely it is to stimulate discussion and shifts in perceptions and practice. Soul City uses a multi-media strategy so that each medium complements the others and messages are reinforced. The vehicle comprises electronic and print media, which run over a three to six - month period each series.

Ongoing vehicle

Soul City is unique in that it is an ongoing strategy. People get to know and love the series, so that each series gets a maximum audience from the first episode.

Formative research & testing

Extensive consultation, research and testing are crucial to the development of a communications strategy of this kind, and have been important components in the Soul City design process:

Strategic planning

An advisory group which is established for each topic to oversee the initial research process, combines the skills of experts in media research, health promotion and adult education and the social sciences.

Literature reviews, audience research and wide consultation locally and internationally are undertaken to define the overall strategy.

Available audience research helped to identify major channels for communication and to inform the project of demographic profiles of prime-time audiences for the various channels.

Development of materials

Before developing the messages and information around issues, Soul City conducts extensive research through focus groups to ascertain existing knowledge, attitudes and practices about the topics.

SERIES 3

HIV / AIDS

South Africa is suffering from an AIDS epidemic; it was estimated that by the end of 1996 2,4 million adults in South Africa would be HIV positive. New HIV infections are increasingly occurring among young, economically active people.

The storylines concerning HIV / AIDS in both the TV and radio series featured prominently in all the episodes. The overall aim was to make AIDS an open issue, portraying it as a disease which can affect ordinary people, living ordinary lives, in a "typical" township (TV) or rural area (radio).

The messages contained in the programmes were:

Anyone can get HIV / AIDS

Care for and support of HIV positive people

There are ways of living positively with AIDS

Condoms can and do prevent the spread of HIV

STD's should be treated

People with AIDS have rights

How did Soul City affect knowledge?

The evaluation showed impressive results in knowledge gain around the issue of HIV / AIDS.

General awareness of the epidemic increased after the intervention, with 92% of those who had accessed the Soul City media being aware of HIV (7% higher than those who had not been exposed to Soul City).

Respondents exposed to the campaign were more likely to know that AIDS cannot be contracted through non-sexual contact (hugging, kissing etc), an important misconception which Soul City

aimed to set straight. For instance, 68% of the Soul City audience knew that people cannot contract the virus by kissing an HIV+ person – compared to 52% of respondents who did not access Soul City.

The most dramatic knowledge gain was amongst the 16-24 year olds. Before Soul City was flighted, only 3% of respondents in this age group could correctly answer a series of questions about transmission of the virus. This figure rose to 70% correct immediately after Soul City was flighted - a significant achievement for Soul City, whose primary target is youth.

Behavioural change

The baseline survey for Soul City revealed frightening statistics: two thirds of respondents reported that they never used condoms. Soul City made considerable headway in tackling the daunting task of changing attitudes and behaviour.

In the post intervention research respondents talked about limiting their sexual activity to a single partner, and the use of condoms. Reasons for those not using condoms fell into four main categories:

Practical reasons (no clinics, can't afford them, etc.)

Reduced pleasure (don't like them - vs "flesh to flesh")

Fears and misconceptions (unreliable, might get lost, etc.)

Social concerns (people will think I'm dirty, etc)

"Me and my partner used to convince one another over flesh to flesh (natural) sexual intercourse. It is no longer the case because of what we learned from Soul City." [Mixed gender, 16-25 yrs, urban]

Results show a greater acceptance of condoms after the intervention, and there was a reported increase in condom usage. The proportion of sexually active people who said they always used a condom increased by 9%, with changing behaviour most evident in younger age groups.

Perceptions, misconceptions and practices relating to safe sex tend to be socially entrenched. Far from being a private affair, sexual activity among youth is often the focus of peer pressure.

"Another problem with us males is that we tend to get pressure from friends just because friends are making you feel inferior by boasting that they have many girlfriends whereas you only have one. You end up going out with many girls, having sex with all of them, and sometimes do not even use condoms. Some even make it a custom not to have one girlfriend." [Male, 16-25 yrs, metro]

TV & RADIO

"I have learned to have one partner and that is my husband.... Yes, before I watched Soul City I used to have a lot of boyfriends but now it is just my husband." [Female, informal]

"Before I did not like the use of condoms on me but after I watched Soul City I have changed." [Male, 16-25, urban]

"In the past I used to think that my girlfriend made a fool out of me if she demanded a condom for our sexual intercourse, but now I see the need." [Male, 16-25, urban]

RADIO

"I argued with my husband about the condom issue because he did not understand why we have to use a condom. He said 'why don't I trust him?' I tried to explain to him that I am doing it for both of us because we cannot be sure, so it's for our own safety." [Female, 40+ yrs, metro]

TV

"I have learnt that STD's are curable but AIDS is not, so prevent it with condoms." [Mixed, 16-25 yrs]

"I have noticed that most of my friends do not believe in condoms. They always brag that they prefer flesh to flesh, as you cannot buy meat from a butchery and eat it with the plastic on." [Mixed gender, 13-15 yrs, metro]

Soul City tackled these issues by including strong messages which targeted the youth. The storylines made them easier to remember

"I like that part played by Stanza who forced his girlfriend to sleep with him because he was influenced by his friends. That part shows us that we must not always listen to friends as peer pressure can mislead sometimes." [Male, 16-24. metro]

"I also liked the part where Stanza's brother was studying with his girlfriend and they both agreed that they spend the night together and he slept on the couch and let her use his bed. From that I learned that one does not have to rush into bed with a new partner before actually going for an AIDS test." [Mixed gender, 13-15 yrs, metro]

TV

"I learnt that it is good to practise safe sex by using a condom. As a result I have been using it ever since I watched Soul City. And I always educate my friends about condoms and advise them as they are for their own safety. I sometimes provide them with condoms because I always carry them." [Male, 16-25, metro]

Attitudes towards HIV / AIDS

One of Soul City's goals was to address the stigma commonly attached to AIDS, and to encourage support for HIV positive people. This entails understanding that HIV+ people are not to blame for their condition and that they are human beings who can live a normal life. Direct messages concerning this and other issues were included in the radio and TV story lines.

Overall, attitudes to people with HIV / AIDS improved, and levels of uncertainty were reduced dramatically. This was particularly striking amongst the younger age groups. People with higher levels of education gained most from the messages tackling prejudice and attitudes towards HIV / AIDS.

One of the Soul City messages was that HIV positive people should not keep their illness a secret. Questions about this issue were included in surveys before and after Soul City; results show enormous decrease in uncertainty and increase in desired response.

The slight increase in the number of positive responses may be linked to a general rise in knowledge about the nature of HIV / AIDS.

What is important, however, is that after Soul City, desirable responses outweighed undesirable responses to attitudinal questions, and uncertainty decreased. Soul City gave the audience knowledge about the disease, enabling them to have informed opinions.

SMOKING

With shrinking Western markets, tobacco companies are targeting new and emerging markets – particularly in developing countries where less stringent controls apply. It is estimated that half of all adult males in developing countries now smoke, and smoking rates are increasing all the time. Women and youth in developing countries are an important target for tobacco companies.

In South Africa, relatively good tobacco control policies and anti-smoking campaigns have to compete against advertisers and the media in general, where smoking is often portrayed as sophisticated or cool.

Soul City conveyed these main messages:

Smoking is not cool

People should try to resist peer pressure to smoke

It is illegal to sell tobacco to children under 16 years

Smoking affects the health of people around you

Giving up smoking is possible and beneficial

Smokers need support from their families and friends to help them give up

Storylines in the series featured a smoker trying to quit, community initiatives to stop shopkeepers selling cigarettes to children, and youngsters trying to pressure others into starting smoking.

How did Soul City affect knowledge regarding smoking?

People who had accessed the Soul City campaign had better knowledge about the effects of smoking on health.

Respondents were asked a series of four questions to test their knowledge about the effects of smoking. The graph below illustrates the performance of the Soul City audience in answering questions correctly. It also demonstrates the relative strength of the respective Soul City vehicles in conveying the message, and the power of media synergy in reinforcing knowledge.

Much of the knowledge gained was around the issue of passive smoking and its harmful effects on children and unborn babies. This knowledge is empowering for non-smokers, who may in turn pressurise smokers around them to kick the habit.

The storyline featured a character (Ali) who repeatedly tried to stop smoking. These humorous episodes captured the imagination of the audience, and contained important lessons about how to quit and how to support people who want to quit.

"I liked Sipho because he has this way of advising people, like in the case of Ali he told him ways to stop smoking and he succeeded." [Mixed, 13-15, metro]

Attitudes and behavioural change towards Smoking

The surveys showed changing perceptions about smoking, with a greater proportion of people saying it was not cool to smoke after being exposed to Soul City. This indicates that anti smoking campaigns, including Soul City, may be having the desired effect in changing social attitudes towards smoking.

Qualitative feedback revealed that a number of people had been inspired to stop smoking or cut down as a result of Soul City.

However, surveys showed that there was no significant change in smoking habits over the three-month period. Smoking rates remained the same before and after Soul City, with just under a quarter of respondents (24%) saying that they smoked every day.

"Yes, I know there is a danger; whenever I light a cigarette I know that I might have an asthma attack next week, but I still do it anyway." [Male, 16-25 yrs, metro]

Anyone who has been a smoker and experienced the extent of the addiction will know that awareness of the harmful effects of smoking does not necessarily lead to behavioural change. Soul City recognises how difficult it is to impact directly on behaviour and that raising consciousness and shifting attitudes are precursors to changing practices. In this respect, the smoking component was successful.

TUBERCULOSIS

The scale of the TB epidemic has been largely overshadowed in South Africa. Yet TB continues to claim more lives each year, and is now the biggest killer in the Western Cape, which has the highest rates in the world. Frequently regarded as a disease which affected our grandparent's generation, many younger people do not recognise the symptoms of TB. The disease does not command the same level of public interest as more recent epidemics like AIDS, even though an large proportion of the upswing in the Tuberculosis epidemic is due to HIV/AIDS.

An important issue affecting the control of TB in this country is the problem of ensuring that people with TB recover from the illness. Very often, TB sufferers do not go for treatment, or discontinue treatment as soon as they start to feel better, and the disease returns with renewed strength. This can lead to drug resistance which makes the epidemic even more difficult to deal with.

Soul City included information about the symptoms and treatment of TB, and also tackled some of the thornier issues of prejudice towards people with TB.

Soul City messages about TB were:

TB can be cured
People who take medication for TB are no longer infectious
Anyone can get TB
People with TB need support and help
People with TB can work
Symptoms of TB
People with TB must complete their treatment

Knowledge gain

Awareness of TB had increased in the evaluation survey, with only 7% of respondents not having heard of it. Significant increases in knowledge of TB was recorded among those groups which were most ignorant of the disease before flighting, namely:

Respondents with no formal education,

Younger respondents (under 40 years), and

Rural respondents (increase of 17%)

In to determine the perceived prevalence of the disease, respondents were asked whether they regarded themselves as being personally at risk. Before flighting Soul City, more respondents with formal education perceived themselves to be at risk than those with no formal education. This pattern was, correctly, reversed after flighting. There also appeared to be an accurate correlation between age and perceived risk of contracting TB, with older people perceived as being more at risk.

Television was the most effective medium in conveying the message that TB is curable. This message was strengthened when respondents had access to two media sources, demonstrating the effectiveness of media synergy.

Surveys results also reflected knowledge gain around symptoms of TB – with increases in the number of people who would associate the disease with weight loss, night sweats and a persistent cough.

Knowledge gain

Respondents were asked a series of questions about the treatment of TB, and the number of correct answers was scored: The results show a considerable improvement in knowledge about treatment after Soul City – particularly that TB sufferers should not stop taking treatment after a few weeks, but should continue the course even if they feel better.

"[Soul City] teaches us that TB is not that dangerous or contagious if the carrier sticks to the medical treatment regularly. We cannot easily get infected even if we live in the same house as the carrier." [Female, 40+ yrs, urban]

RADIO

While there was considerable improvement in knowledge levels after the Soul City intervention, the results did not reflect hugely significant disparities between those respondents who had accessed the Soul City media and those who had not. It was noted that there were a number of public awareness campaigns around TB at the time of flighting, resulting in a general increase in common knowledge.

Moreover, TB was not dealt with as extensively as other issues such as HIV / AIDS – TB issues appeared in only three of the Soul City TB episodes, and were not woven throughout the series as was HIV / AIDS.

Attitudes and behavioural change

There are a number of misconceptions about TB which affects society's acceptance of TB sufferers.

"They think that someone who has TB has been bewitched." [Female, urban]

Other participants spoke about TB being used as a threat to discourage people from smoking.

Respondents in both surveys were asked to comment on the statement: "Only alcoholics and dirty people get TB". In the pre-Soul City survey, over half the respondents agreed with this statement – an alarming misconception which was reduced by 12% after Soul City.

Soul City tried to raise knowledge of TB and to address some of the prejudice around TB by emphasising that anyone can get TB – in the case of Soul City TV, it was the clinic doctor.

"I liked the episode where the nurse contracted TB. It shows that TB is not only meant for those who could be perceived as lower class – but is a disease that can be contracted by anyone."
[Mixed gender, 25-40 yrs, urban]

LAND & HOUSING

In South Africa, under apartheid, access to land and resources have been historically manipulated, with millions of black South Africans being strategically dispossessed of their homes and land. The new democratic government has committed itself to land reform and restitution, and the right to land, basic housing and services are now enshrined in the Constitution.

Soul City aimed to raise awareness of land and housing issues and encourage people to discuss them by focussing on the process of characters coming together to resolve land and housing problems. Soul City radio focused on restitution and tenure issues in rural areas.

The Soul City media incorporated a number of messages, including the following:

All South Africans have equal right of access to land
Accessing land and housing can be a lengthy process
Land reform is a demand-driven process, and communities can organise and work together to access land
Land issues are not only for men
There are laws protecting security of tenure
A government subsidy scheme and other forms of financial assistance are available
Land redistribution and restitution programmes

In order to cater for particular land and housing needs in urban and rural areas, completely different storylines were evolved for the TV and radio series:

In Soul City TV (accessed largely by urban residents), people living in shacks had their homes flooded after heavy rains. They discussed their problem, established a committee which drew up a housing plan and identified a piece of land suitable for housing. The plan was submitted to their local councilor and they succeeded in acquiring a piece of land to settle on.

The radio series, by contrast, focused on restitution issues. The storyline was about a group of farmworkers who were evicted from farm land and started to build shacks on a piece of land in the village. When threatened with legal action they approached the Department of Land affairs to find out about land reform and land tenure.

Knowledge gain

The survey tested awareness regarding three particular land reform programmes, namely:

the government subsidy scheme,
the land restitution programme, and
the land redistribution programme.

Results showed that Soul City audiences had considerably higher levels of knowledge than those who had not accessed Soul City, and the efficacy of the multi-media vehicle in reinforcing messages was once again endorsed.

As would be expected, urban and more educated people had higher levels of knowledge. Further, knowledge was greater in the middle age group (30-49), being those people most likely to have to be responsible for providing housing.

Much of the knowledge gained was in the form of practical information gleaned from the storyline. Shack dwellers, in particular, found this helpful:

"We are put in the light about the realities of people living in shacks. It also advises us on safe areas in order to erect a shack, not near the river, and how to zone your area for security reasons." [Male, 16-24 yrs, informal]

TV & RADIO

"With Soul City I have learnt that before we build our shacks we should check the quality of the soil because if we don't our shacks will be full of water in rainy days." [Female, informal]

Attitudes

Results showed considerable disparities in awareness levels among men and women – particularly with regard to the housing subsidy scheme. Soul City challenged traditional gender roles by depicting women as active role-players in the process of acquiring land and housing. In the surveys conducted before and after Soul City, respondents were asked to respond to the statement:

"Women-headed households should have the same rights to land and housing as male-headed households."

The greatest shift of opinion was in rural Belfast, where the number of people agreeing with the statement increased by 23% after Soul City.

Responses to attitudinal questions about land and housing were encouraging: the majority of respondents wished to participate in building their own homes, and agreed that people should pay for household services – reflecting the spirit of reconstruction and development in this country.