The Role of Local Leaders in Cultural Transformation and Development

ABSTRACT

Through cross-disciplinary and participatory processes involving key stakeholders from the Zambian education sector, as well as from the traditional leadership structure, a localized HIV/AIDS prevention strategy, Interactive School and Community Approach (ISACA), was developed and implemented throughout one province between 2002 and 2006. The study is guided by constructivist grounded theory, and explores the impact of the chiefs` involvement in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS through close collaboration and interaction across traditionally vertical boundaries, e.g. between the formal educational and traditional leadership structures . The strategy created communicative spaces for the merger of western and indigenous knowledge. The study reveals the importance of involving the chiefs, the custodians of culture and traditions in cultural transformation and development, and shows their significant role as gate-openers and change agents, a precondition for sustainable local development.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Recent HIV/AIDS discourses critique the lack of contextualisation and cultural relevance in HIV/AIDS prevention programs (UNESCO 2008, Baxen & Breidlid 2009). In this paper, I discuss the importance of situating such programs in a local context by analysing the role and agency of local leaders, chiefs, chieftenesses and head men (HM) in HIV/AIDS prevention activities in programming and implementation. The paper argues that the involvement of the traditional leaders makes a significant contribution to the quality of a program by acting as gate openers to the community at large, breaking cultural barriers and taboos and creating spaces for dialogue and reflective learning across epistemological and institutional boundaries. This contribution is based upon a common purpose and a shared vision (Hart 2009), which is a precondition for sustainable change. Bridges are being built through cooperative relationships and reciprocal and collaborative practices between different actors who are rooted in the local 'expressive culture' (Lassiter 2003).

The paper begins by briefly contextualising the study and describes the HIV/AIDS strategy and research methodology applied. The key HIV/AIDS discourses are the highlighted and the traditional leadership structure and its impact on fighting HIV/AIDS through cultural transformation explored.

Context

The HIV/Aids pandemic in Zambia is among the worst in Sub-Saharan Africa. Recent statistics (UN Global Report 2010:182) show that in 2001, the total number of those infected in Zambia was estimated to be around 800,000. That figure increased to one million in 2009. Of these cases, approximately 860,000 were over 15 years old in a total population of approximately 12 million people.

The life expectancy rate has been reduced from approximately 55 years in 2000 to 37 years currently (http://www.toppafrika.no/index.php/faktazambia.html). More than 70 percent of people live below the poverty level and approximately 70 percent live in rural areas. It is within this context that the Province Education Officer decided to make a specific effort to develop a relevant HIV/AIDS prevention program, a so-called 'social vaccine', within the existing national, decentralised, educational policy (MOE 2000).

Nationally, the illiteracy level among adults is about 30 percent; the highest is among women in the rural areas. Illiterate parents were commonly referred to by the educators as one barrier to the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information. Education, it has been argued, is a 'social vaccine' (Kelly 1999), but research shows that even though the students acquire knowledge about HIV/AIDS, behavioural change does not necessarily follow (Baxen & Breidlid 2009). Even though the impact of HIV/AIDS education varies, as do the programs and means of education the prevalence, specifically for youths, continues to remain high.

The HIV/AIDS Program

This program, organised under the Provincial Education Office (PEO), targets districts and public schools. The program was facilitated by a core committee comprised of the PEO`s senior planner, the HIV/AIDS specialist, one district education officer, the principal of a teacher training college, one head teacher and a foreign technical assistant. An Interactive Community- and School-based Approach (ISACA) was guided by the following principles: broad stakeholder involvement in all stages of the program, including the planning phase; facilitation through empowering heterogeneous and homogenous group work; participatory and interactive methods, which fostered the raising of topics and concerns that were motivated by and reflected local needs; horizontal sharing; and across traditional vertical borders or barriers, for example, the education structure and institutions and the traditional leadership structures.
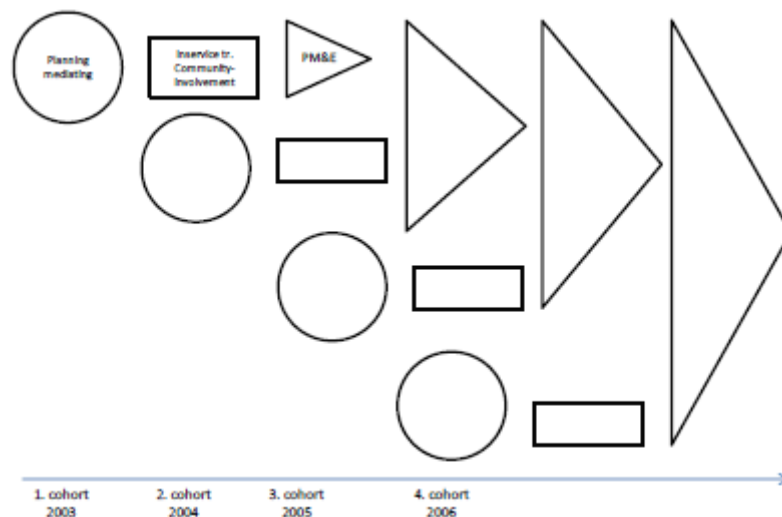
Figure 1. The iterative process of ISACA cohorts from 2003-2006.

The main activities in the ISACA(see Figure 1) started with participatory planning workshops at the district level (circles), which were attended by representatives from Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), religious, local and traditional leaders, students and pupils. All information sharing regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic was followed by strategic planning for district application. This planning process was followed by school and community-based training workshops using interactive methodologies and counselling, (rectangles) which focused on local interventions and strategies. Finally, annual participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) workshops (triangles) guided by a jointly developed, piloted and approved manual were conducted. These turned out to be important sessions for critical reflection, sharing, learning and revisions across districts and schools.

Methodology

The close collaboration between a range of stakeholders, including the traditional leaders, local chiefs and/or HM and staff from the education sector, opened up new modes of working across and within each of these domains. Cultural and Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and expansive learning (Engeström 2001, 2008) were used as tools to explore the processes of resistance and change; they also focused on the importance of involving traditional leaders in this process.

CHAT is an interdisciplinary approach to human science. It goes beyond the assumptions characterising cultural groups as 'carriers of culture''. Rather, it characterises commonalities in understanding processes and locates characteristics in a more situated and dynamic view (Gutiérrez 2003). This is compounded by an interest in 'grasping developmental potentials by initiating and supporting change in practical work-based activity' (Engeström 1990:72 in Avis 2010:157). Moll (1990:164) argues that learning processes should focus 'on the collaborative use of mediational means to create, obtain and communicate meaning'. In his theory of expansive learning, Engeström (2001) explores learning and development through

collective activities by using a minimum of two activity systems where the starting point is a partnership between actors and institutions (Engeström 2008). The contextual realities in which everybody is either infected or affected by HIV/AIDS engaged and motivated people to develop a common vision through which to search for preventive strategies and negotiated interventions – for example through a shared object or intervention - to fight the epidemic (Ellis 2010, Engeström 2001).

Expansive learning takes place at the crossroads of education, knowledge management and innovation. It investigates the links between the individual and the social in vertical and horizontal dimensions of concept formation and knowledge creation (Engström 2001). The horizontal sideways dimension of co-learning is strategically mediated, and sub-groups are constantly faced with questioning and reconfiguration in the cultural context of rules and boundaries, for example, power dimensions (Engström 2008:15). These interactions gradually turn into what Ledwith and Asgill (2000:290) refer to as 'alliances of difference'. These alliances acknowledge the need for sustained, horizontal forms of collaboration. The collaborative approach takes the organisational and cultural context as an integral, constitutive aspect of the phenomena to be explained. Creative meetings between everyday concepts allow multiple competing ideas to emerge by renegotiating and reorganizing collaborative relations and practices of the systems involved (Engeström 2008, Avis 2010).
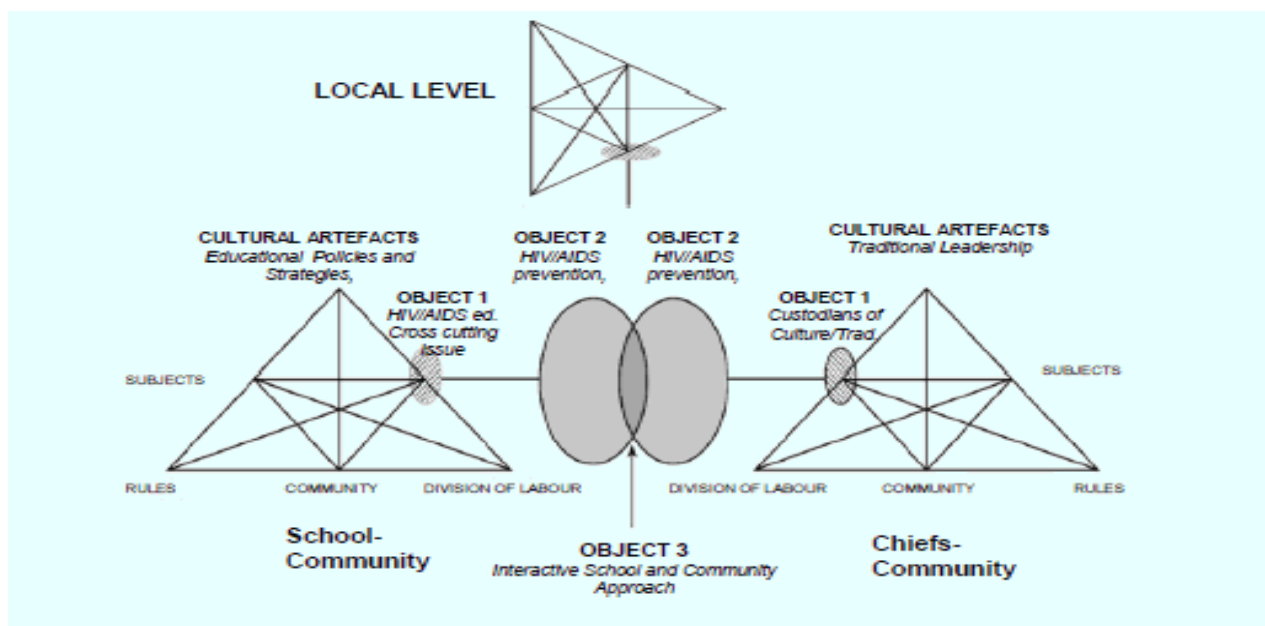

Figure 2. Applied model of the key activity systems (Engeström 2008:4, Carm 2011).

This paper focuses on the collaboration between the administrative and educational staff of the public school system and the chiefs and HM who represent the traditional leadership structures. The negotiated objects are reflected in the merger of knowledge systems represented by each of these collaborating partners, that is, the formal education system coming from a western epistemology that adopts a scientific approach to HIV/AIDS prevention, and the other arising from local traditions and cultural practices that are carried

forward by the traditional leaders, such as the situated articulation of villagers everyday experiences.

The identification of contradictions between Western knowledge and indigenous knowledge in the activity systems helps practitioners and administrators to focus their efforts on the root causes of problems. Such collaborative analysis and modelling is a precondition for the creation of a shared vision and for the expansive solution of the contradictions.

The ideal cycle of expansive learning takes place in a multi-voiced process of debate and negotiations where individual subjects question the existing practice (Engeström & Sannino 2010). The production of new concepts and practices are consolidated or revised through analyses and reflections on the contradictions. Innovations can be viewed as a stepwise, although non-linear, construction of new forms of collaborative practices that might also influence the division of labour between and within the activity systems (Engeström 2001), These practices may, for example, take place between the traditional leaders and representatives of the educational sector to redefine and transform their HIV/AIDS interventions.

Collins (2011) argues that CHAT and Freirean participatory action research (PAR) traditions are deeply compatible and complementary. From the CHAT perspective, Freirean PAR would seem to have special value in terms of how it links its concept of human activity to issues of politics, ideology and social justice. In this way, Freire's contribution enables CHAT to connect its underlying emancipatory vision and purpose to the problems confronting people today. PAR also allows the researcher to fully engage in the social life and activities of those being studied (Bryman 2008). The research is based upon qualitative and constructivist grounded theoretical research methods. Through a constant comparative and interactive approach, the research takes a reflexive stance toward actions, situations, and participants seeking to understand phenomena in a context-specific way (Charmaz 2003). All names in this paper have been changed to preserve anonymity.

HIV/AIDS DISCOURSES

Education and HIV/AIDS Prevention

Most of the contemporary studies on HIV/AIDS education have emphasised what is already known by various target groups (what studies – please provide references to key studies) in relation to the school curriculum content, misconceptions, facts, figures and scientific perspectives on HIV/AIDS reflect in a global (approach and global UNAIDS evaluation framework and statistics detailing the number of people infected, the use of condoms and access to medical care and treatment (reference). The epistemological questions posed within HIV/AIDS research remain driven by medical, economic and political discourses, which are primarily shaped by a need to know the *what* rather than to understand the deeply discursive situated contexts in which people live (Baxen & Breidlid 2009). Aggleton and Parker's (2003) agree that understanding the broader social context is central to the success of

program intervention. This necessitates culturally relevant approaches to HIV/AIDS prevention.

Aggleton and Richard (2003) also argue that most of the HIV/AIDS prevention intervention designs seem to function in large part according to what Freire (1970) identified as a 'banking' theory of pedagogy. In this theory, the perceived deficit accounts of those being 'educated' are somehow 'filled' by intervention specialists who presume they know what is needed. Action Aid (2003) compared HIV/AIDS education in Kenya and India and revealed that teachers applied a 'selective teaching approach'. They enhanced scientific issues relating to HIV/AIDS in their teaching and left out sensitive the issues of sexuality and culture.

Culture and HIV/AIDS

Another theme running through the discourse on HIV/AIDS in Africa appears to place the blame for the spread of AIDS either on African cultural practices or modernisation. In its HIV/AIDS Peer Education Training of Trainers Manual, the Zambia Ministry of Education (MOE 2004) states that cultural practices often result in circumstances which increase the likelihood of transmitting HIV. According to the manual, these include: initiation ceremonies, polygamy, ritual cleansing, traditional medicine and dry sex.

Others blame modernisation, Western influence, disruption of traditional values and dress code for the spread of the pandemic. As the MOE (2006) argues, rapid urbanisation, that is, rural-urban migration, has severely eroded traditional and cultural values. For example, in the past, premarital sexual activity was considered socially unacceptable.

Others argue that cultural practices and modernisation may have accelerated the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As Gausset states in relation to the Pacific region, 'On the one hand, some cultural practices may hasten the spread of AIDS. On the other side, disruptions of traditions associated with urban and Western life (prostitution, the breakdown of social and moral control) might also be seen as increasing the speed with which the epidemic spreads' (Gausset 2001:512). However, the notion that restoring cultural traditions or fighting against tradition will solve the problem of AIDS is naïve. Both of these discourses focus on the wrong targets. "Whether people live an idealized traditional Tonga way of life or, on the contrary, behave and think like Europeans, AIDS will still be there and continue to spread unless people practice safe sex and safe blood contacts"(ibid).

The assumptions that polygamy, sexual cleansing, dry sex, circumcision and beliefs in witchcraft are incompatible with safe sexual behaviour do not mean that people would necessarily adopt safe behaviour if these cultural practices disappeared (Gausset 2001). The major problems relating to AIDS prevention involve the negotiation of safe sex rather than cultural barriers. Extrapolating to the African context from Guasset's comments, we can say that the obstacles linked to AIDS prevention are not grounded in specific African cultural practices (though certain cultural practices need to be modified as I discuss later). 'Indeed, it would be not only a waste of resources, but also unethical and counterproductive to use AIDS prevention campaigns to fight these practices' (Gausset 2001:150). Therefore, anti-AIDS projects should not fight against one local African culture in order to impose another

(Western), but should rather try to make behaviour and practices safer in a way that is culturally acceptable to people.

Questions of power, inequality and exclusion are heavily linked with HIV and AIDS-related taboos, stigmatisation and discrimination (Aggleton & Parker 2003:16).

Human Rights Perspectives, Customary Laws and Gender

Despite guarantees of non-discrimination in the Zambian Constitution, customary laws and practices, especially in relation to divorce, inheritance, adultery, child marriages and defilement, still place women in subordinate positions and directly contribute to the spread of AIDS. These discriminatory practices increase female vulnerability to HIV.

For example, the practice of paying *lobola* under customary law restricts a woman's ability to leave an abusive marriage as she becomes the property of the man and his family. This commodification of women increases women's vulnerability to violence (Human Rights Watch 2003). The practice of 'property-grabbing' is the unlawful appropriation of property by relatives or others from a widow and her children who have no inheritance rights. This practice can have serious implications for a widow's ability to maintain herself and her children, sometimes leading them into professions that carry the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS (ibid).

According to the director of Child Affairs Department, 'Zambia is a culture of men' (Human Rights Watch 2003:20). This statement was further supported by UN Special Envoy, Stephen Lewis, who argued that Zambian girls are raised to be obedient and submissive to males and not to assert themselves (ibid). The government of Zambia also acknowledges that the key underlying cultural factor that makes girls vulnerable to HIV is their subordinate status, which again deepens their social and economic dependency on men (MOE 2004).

Such discrimination is a clear breach of human rights. Researchers (Aggleton & Parker 2003) call for community mobilisation aimed at resisting stigmatisation and discrimination and a rights-based approach to reducing HIV and AIDS-related stigmatisation and discrimination which aims to transform the social climate so that stigmatisation and discrimination no longer are tolerated.

TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE AND STYLE

Traditional Leadership Structure Zambia

. In order to explain and explore the role of chiefs in Zambia, it is important to understand how the traditional leadership has existed prior to and then in parallel with the parliamentary system in post-colonial Zambia (Gersheim 1997). The chief inherits his position through patrimonial or matrimonial lines. The House of Chiefs is the national governing body with its own constitution and can be seen as recognition by the post-colonial state of the continuing, albeit redefined, legitimacy of traditional leaders (Taarn 2005). Their legitimacy is 'differently-rooted' according to Taarn (2005), and can be understood in terms of 'divided legitimacy' whereby political legitimacy is divided between the postcolonial state and the traditional authorities or traditional leaders. That legitimacy is derived from their

constituencies, as they regard themselves as both citizens of the state with attendant rights and as followers or subjects of traditional leaders whom, they expect, should act as development agents (ibid).

According to the Zambian Constitution (1996), the chiefs' national governing body is regulated by the Constitution of Zambia under the Institution of Chiefs, which states there shall be a House of Chiefs for the republic, which shall be an advisory body to the government on traditional, customary and any other matters referred to it by the president (Gersheim 1997). According to article 131, the chiefs shall initiate, discuss, consider and decide on any bill or matters that relate to traditions, customary laws and practices. The House of Chiefs in Zambia was re-established towards the end of 2003 and Provincial Councils of Chiefs were held in all provinces to allow the chiefs select their representatives to the House of Chiefs. It has 27 members as each province elects three members. Zambia has a total of 286 chiefs.

Through the Interzonal Council, there is a direct link between the national House of Chiefs, the zonal levels, and the chiefdoms at the community and village level. What is significant here, however, is the absence of a formal link between the traditional leadership and the public governing structure GTZ (2004). Out of the four chiefdoms taking part in their survey, only two were represented in the District Development Coordinating Committee (DDCC), an important governmental body at the district level. According to GTZ, the absence of such representation may have implications for the involvement of the chiefdoms at the formal level (2004:75).

In Zambia today, the House of Chiefs give mandates to the chiefs who are responsible for culture, traditions and the customary laws and practices in their respective chiefdoms, which are comprised of 200-350 of villages. The chiefs preside over courts to resolve conflicts related to customary law and other local issues such as thefts, lack of school attendance and early marriages.

Findings from studies of chiefs' involvement in HIV/AIDS prevention in Botswana, South Africa and Ghana by Taarn (2005) has categorised traditional leaders' HIV/AIDS activities into three types. The first is *gatekeepers,* where traditional leaders open doors to outside advocates, lending them legitimacy or credibility in the community, the second is *social marketing*, where a traditional leader develops a level of expertise and speaks out on the issue of HIV/AIDS him or herself. This delivers an even stronger message than gatekeeping, since it more closely associates the traditional leader in the struggle against the disease (http://www.idrc.ca/EN/Pages/default.aspx) and the third category is *local capacity building* where traditional leaders work with government, NGOs, etc. to develop strategies for HIV/AIDS prevention (ibid). I will return to these categories in the findings and discussions section.

WESTERN AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Asante (2003) argues that the construction of the Western notions of Knowledge based on the Greek model is a relatively recent construction that began with the European Renaissance. It advocates that only Europeans are entitled to, and have the ability to, construct rational thought (ibid). The notion of a Western rational and scientific knowledge system, or epistemology (understood following Smith (1999:22) as a complex ideology promoting a cultural, intellectual and technical expression) contrasts with indigenous knowledge systems and indigenous epistemologies. A commitment to a particular knowledge system not only predetermines the kinds of generalisations made about the subject under investigation but also 'provides the means for changing the world' (Guha 1997 in Bankoff 2001:17).

Colonial education provided a common structure of schooling throughout Africa with a curriculum based on an epistemology rooted in Western traditions (Tikly 2001:7) and which was organised around the idea of disciplines and fields of knowledge (Smith 1999:65). Indigenous knowledge systems are dynamic and have centuries of use. They are contextually situated, based on experience and adapted to local culture and environment (IIRR 1996). They are not subject to 'disciplines' and knowledge is holistic in the sense that it encompasses both the spiritual world with the physical world. Being transferable and having time-tested reliability, Sillitoe (1998) argues that it has the potential to be applied to other regions.

According to Tylor (1871 in Gausset 2001), culture is the complexity of knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Culture in this specific sense is 'the patterned way of life shared by a group of people' (Nanda 1987:68, quoted in Gausset 2001:150). But cultural practices are dynamic and continuously changing in response to external factors such as disease. In Zambian society today, the chiefs and the elders carry the obligation to maintain cultural heritage, including customs, moral, social norms and developments. According to Mbigi (1995 in Van der Colff 2003:257) an important concept in African cultural history is *ubuntu*, that is, 'togetherness'. Ubuntu refers to collective personhood and collective morality. In trying to explain African management, Mbigi draws attention to the cultural concept of ubuntu, using it to explain African management, empowerment and transformation by focusing on three main principles: leadership legitimating, communal enterprise and value sharing. These are evinced in beliefs of interconnectedness, continuous integrated development, respect and dignity, collectivism and solidarity. The chiefs' legitimate authority and power, through the practice of ruling by consent, are important for their role as 'gate openers' for re-defining and deconstructing social norms.

ZAMBIAN HIV/AIDS EDUCATION, CONTEXTUAL AND CULTURAL REALITIES

HIV/AIDS Fatigue

As a pre-preparatory phase, 16 schools were surveyed to assess the status of the HIV/AIDS educational activities. The findings revealed that in spite of having a national policy on HIV/AIDS education, where HIV/AIDS should be a cross-cutting topic at primary school level (MOE 2001), teachers included a five minute HIV/AIDS information session before

every lesson based upon a 2000 circular. These sessions involved the repetition of phrases, such as 'Aids is a killer', 'Be faithful' and 'Abstinence' (ABC). Findings revealed that many students came to class five minutes late to avoid the HIV/AIDS sensitisation. There was a sense of HIV/AIDS information fatigue. HIV/AIDS education was rarely taught in schools as a cross-cutting issue. Culture did not allow people to talk openly about HIV/AIDS as it was viewed as 'taboo'. This, along with a lack of relevant teaching and learning materials and pre- or in-service training, created major obstacles for the schools and teachers when trying to implement the policy.

The survey also revealed a myriad of HIV/AIDS interventions being run by religious and secular, public and private, local and global, international actors and NGOs. They included varied and uncoordinated inputs, including school-based interventions, capacity building strategies and/or provision of teaching material which was irrelevant to the local context and for which there were few teacher manuals. As a result they were left in storage as teachers did not know how to use them.

Of the 16 schools surveyed, two involved traditional leaders in their HIV/AIDS activities. In these schools, parents and community members were also taking part in discussions and activities related to HIV/AIDS prevention. This was not the case in the other schools. This seemed to indicate that the inclusion of traditional leaders was not consistent. .

FINDINGS, CONTRADICTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the following sections, I discuss various findings and discussions of transformation within and between the two activity systems (Engeström 2008) as illustrated in Figure 2. The first part relates to transformation of organisational work relations within the activity systems based upon the chiefs' involvement. The second part illustrates how the coming together of indigenous knowledge systems with a western knowledge system, represented by the two activity systems, created space and opened up localised HIV/AIDS discourses. Finally, I will present some of the HIV/AIDS interventions created and implemented by the chiefs, categorized according Taarn`s concepts (2005) of chiefs role as gatekeepers, through social marketing and local capacity building.

Transformation of Organizational Work Relations within and across the Activity Systems

One of the key factors contributing to changes experienced during the ISACA project period was the principle of a broad participation of different stakeholders and their involvement. In the welcoming speech in the first planning session, cohort one, 2003, the District Education Office representative stated that the gathering was the *'first of its kind in Zambia'*, that it transcended boundaries by breaking taboos and traditions. He concluded by saying: *Now,* [we are] *not afraid to sit next to chiefs!* (Workshop 2003). The speech reflected the traditional vertical barriers and borders between various societal organisations and institutions, the division of roles and the lack of interaction between different groups.

All groups of stakeholders focused on the importance of working together. The lecturers at the teacher training college underscored the need to collaborate with all stakeholders, traditional and civic leaders. The district education officers made statements suggesting a need for close collaboration, and the hope that the whole program could develop an open, transparent collaboration. This was also underscored by the chiefs: *Cultural awareness raising is needed, schools, community, parents! A close collaboration between chiefs and MOEZ structure has to be strengthened.*

The impact of this is further explored in the minutes from the same workshop. *Conclusions drawn from this workshop* [were] *quite useful in the sense that the stakeholders of different ages, status, and background[s] interacted and shared the common views of interest on the killer disease, HIV/AIDS. It was an eye opener in a way, especially to those handling young children. The voices of children were the loudest as they challenged the parents, elders in civil and traditional society* (College Tutor, minutes, date needed.

Sharing and interacting across traditional boundaries allowed each cluster of participants to listen to the different HIV/AIDS discourses existing in the society, that is, different views, experiences, challenges and possibilities for ways forward. Through the discussions and negotiations that followed, the voices of 'the other' had to be considered and included which proved to an empowering process as well as an 'eye opener' for the participants, creating empathy and understanding across traditional borders.

The importance of the educational and the other sectors present to work together was underlined in the DEO's speech (2003). *HIV/AIDS is not just the responsibility of the Ministry of Health but it concerns and involves us all.* Interestingly, the way of working together was akin to the old traditional principles of ubuntu as several attendees expressed the idea of *togetherness*, and *together we will win.*

That this also seemed to be a rather unique way of working was confirmed by Chief Phiri and Chief Mayombe when the program was applied to other districts, including the fourth cohort, four years later. *First time as chief—first time for us to be in such a workshop with so many MOE staff.* He added that *I appreciate that you have included the chiefs in looking into this in our district.* In the same meeting, the recommendations for the way forward underlined that *sensitization should be an on-going process, from the village level to the chiefs' councils. Chiefs, HM/women* (should) *continue to hold workshops and ceremonies with MOE and civic leaders in the fight against HIV/AIDS.*

In the initial phase of the project, the schools worked with representatives from the traditional leadership structure, and this opened up new modes of collaboration, which otherwise would be randomly implemented, if at all as was revealed in our survey (2001–2).

One of the major results of ISACA was the close collaboration between the two activity systems. The chiefs were involved in training activities, planning, implementation and the execution of activities in their own chiefdoms. And as commented by the senior province HIV/AIDS officer, *the HIV/AIDS education cannot be isolated at school and classroom level. If we want it to have an impact on the pupils' lives and behaviour, we will have to reach*

outside the classroom, involve the parents, the community-leaders, the chiefs, relevant NGOs, health clinics and churches, all those being a member of the community.

Regular training workshops in line with the structure of ISACA underlined the importance of not only involving local actors, but of knowledge sharing between all actors in order to be able to make informed decisions and reflections on all levels of HIV/AIDS intervention. Based upon this common vision, the traditional leaders worked hand in hand with the school to sensitise pupils and communities. By doing this, they contributed to the monitoring of the HIV/AIDS activities.

In 2004, Chief Muyombe suggested the new approach by saying, *from that workshop we were all involved, working* with the Ministry of Education. In 2005, this was echoed by Chief Mashawa when he recalled his experiences at the workshop. *I am also observing classes. Teachers seem to like teaching HIV/AIDS* (through interactive methods). *Pupils even open up!* Both he and teachers were surprised to hear what pupils said. *It influences the community*, he continued, *they now gain knowledge from the children. Parents also informed and sensitised the Parent Teachers Association (PTA). They now come to meet me, telling about the knowledge of their children. The PTA executive is very interested.*

Similar views were later expressed by stakeholders at different stages and in different contexts and ways. In 2005, during a field visit to a district from the third cohort, the district HIV/AIDS counsellor reported that *the district and schools visited, have proven to have a close collaboration with the community through chiefs, HM and PTA support and involvement.* According to her, this was the key reason for the successful implementation of HIV/AIDS education at school level.

According to the senior PEO HIV/AIDS advisor, the MOE employees were also happy to see how this collaboration helped bridge the link between the schools, the parents and the broader community. The chiefs' direct contribution down to the classroom level is illustrated by this story told by a head teacher at a primary school in 2004. *We have action groups, going out to the community. The senior head man* [is the] *leader of the action group. One child turned HIV positive, now* [he is] *at school, before they hid the child from going to school. Parents said 'I was shy', now they open up. This is after the guidance and counselling, they know this is confidential.* The story also illustrates the issue of stigma and taboo. Under these circumstances, trust is crucial so families know that neither they nor the child will suffer from stigmatisation.

Two other structural interventions initiated during a district-planning meeting in 2005 show how innovations emerged through multi-voiced participation and the iterative aspect of this approach. The lack of a formal link between the traditional leadership structure and the formal, public structure, as previously mentioned, was raised by Chief Chongo who argued that it had to be resolved at a community level. His idea was supported in the meeting and was later formally approved as a pilot when the chief was accepted as a member of the community development committee (CDC). The same meeting also revealed that around 50 out-of-school children were regularly observed playing on the outskirts of the community

centre. Through negotiations with an NGO, a community school was established to support their schooling.

The Merger of Indigenous Knowledge and Western Knowledge, Reflection and Negotiations

The principles of expansive learning that underlie CHAT focus specifically on learning in praxis through interaction and dialogue. By trying to find a common strategy to resolve common challenges and problems through negotiations and consensus makes this approach a useful tool. Discussing strategies to fight HIV/AIDS had to include the various discourses that related to scientific factual knowledge about the disease, cultural barriers and taboos that actually prevented people from speaking up and prevented children from getting information from their parents. This discussion created different spaces in which people could discuss HIV/AIDS in the open and gradually overcame one social barrier—talking openly about HIV/AIDS. This was underscored by one of the team members, Ms Banda, during a 2003 planning session, *We need to bring all the district staff on board to enable them to open up and talk, to become comfortable: Now after the work shop* [induction] *we are able to talk freely about HIV/AIDS.* According to the minutes from a follow up training workshop, Ms Banda welcomed the traditional leaders and requested that the Honourable Chiefs contribute because they play an important role in fighting HIV/AIDS. As Chief Moyombe said during the induction of the fourth cohort in 2006, *Children now should open up. They are not supposed to talk about sex. We are not used to that in our country. We . . . say don't, don't talk. The schools say talk . . . about this. At school they open up, coming out, and close at household level, in terms of sex education.* The chiefs' participation played an important role when old customs and practices were challenged and transformed.

The sharing and interaction between the activity systems reflected on key traditions and cultural practices that were fuelling the spread of HIV/AIDS by asking: Why and how could one find ways of combating the spread? Western scientific knowledge and familiarity with the everyday life of people their traditions was the knowledge basis used to devise the best solutions.

It was generally acknowledged that the chiefs would discuss options with their HM and parliament to find local solutions to transform their traditions and practices in a way that did not put their people at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. As a lecturer stated at the induction workshop, *We need to merge, Western education on HIV/AIDS infection . . . and thereby enable the chiefs to take action!*

The approach realised the importance of keeping traditions but abolishing practices that were detrimental to combating the disease. Some of these issues will be explored in the following sections.

Chiefs as Gatekeepers

In this study, the chiefs' involvement in the program was the main reason why HIV/AIDS messages could reach the local communities. Their support of the education sector was a key

issue. The chiefs showed the teachers and pupils that they, through their engagement, opened up a space to talk about sex and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. By working hand in hand with the chiefs, supported by MOE, the schools used an interactive practice that gradually moved away from 'the five minute approach'. The collaboration also improved the link between the schools, the parents and the wider community, thereby creating a better learning environment that included the dissemination of HIV/AIDS information. Teachers were able to include relevant cultural aspects in their teaching, and the pupils contributed with their own experiences and views.

The following section looks at the three categories developed by Taarn (2005), when describing the role of the chiefs and illustrates the type of activities initiated in HIV/AIDS prevention and cultural transformation. It demonstrates how collaborating partners learned from the activities initiated by the local chiefs in local development.

Social Marketing

The traditional leaders gradually developed a level of expertise and created a space for the dissemination of information related to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The chiefs sensitised the communities about traditional beliefs and practices that might enhance and prevent further spread of the disease. They included HIV/AIDS information in their local traditional ceremonies and gatherings and developed new relationships with schools and PTAs thereby contributing to reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS through their structuresThey also sensitized other chiefs through their participation in zonal and inter-zonal meetings, in which they exchanged and shared ideas and experiences.

Some of the more influential chiefs were proactive beyond the range of the program itself, For example,.at a meeting in 2004, Chief Tembo announced that he got approval from the Chiefs' Board at the provincial level to tell the Royal Foundation of Chiefs in Lusaka about the HIV/AIDS approach that was taking place in his province. He wanted to address a way forward.The members of the House of Chiefs agreed to pass a bill saying that the Honourable Chiefs must be involved in HIV/AIDS prevention. In 2005, Chief Tembo was interviewed on national TV about their activities initiatives and the impacts, also arguing for the importance of involving the chiefs in fighting HIV/AIDS.

Local Capacity Building, Chiefs' Intervention through Cultural Transformation

In this following section, I will show how the local chiefs, through their parliament, transformed traditional practices by keeping rituals as cultural markers but turned them into practices that reduced the risk of being infected. In other instances, local laws were established to prevent or prohibit certain activities.

Gender roles

Women's subordinate status in Zambian society is being contested from a human rights and gender equality perspective (Human Rights Watch, 2002). Gender abuse and practices revealed during the 2005 workshop are reflected in some of the following quotes. *Due to poverty, our women are forced into bad activities*. During a visit to Chief Moyombe's palace

in 2004, one HM stated that *teachers should not teach HIV/AIDS,* [they are] *not ready to talk about it.* [They] *are still the one abusing the pupils*. In this statement the HM addressed the culture of gender related violence, even by those being trusted to teach and implement HIV/AIDS education.

Another aspect of gender inequality was raised by Chief Phiri (Workshop 2006). [Now] *issues of property grabbing . . . when [a] father dies, we inherit women, and also property and children . . . . this is now a separate issue . . . [I] have accepted as a chief that these old practices will have to be abolished.* This shows how the chiefs actually contributed to changing customs and allowed women to inherit their husbands' property.

Minutes from a training workshop in 2006 revealed that *more risk was with girls due to being forced to marry early and getting pregnant while still young* (Secretary, 3/11). The chiefs involved seemed to agree that early pregnancies should be abolished. In 2006, Chief Chongo's HM said the chief did not allow any girl under 16 to marry in his chiefdom and added, *We are gender sensitive!*

In 2005 another HM highlighted how the location of the straw cottages also impacted pregnancies and early marriages. *A 13-year old should marry, and the chief took it up seriously, talked to parents. As the girl grew up, the girl, according to our traditions moved to another hut outside the main house. Now* (after the incidence of pregnancy) *the girls' houses are being built close to the main house! The villagers have all the respect for him and follow his* (Chief Chongo) *orders.* By changing the location of the hut, the girls could still move out but were ensured protection by their families.

Initiation Ceremonies

Initiation ceremonies can be problematic in an HIV/AIDS context. In 2004, one senior HM argued that the *Old practice of initiation should be abolished, three months sexual practice being taught in sex* [rather teach] *the girl to protect herself!* In 2004, the MOE stated that with training from the initiation leaders, the elderly women, the initiation ceremonies could be key to pupils' understanding of HIV, its transmission and how girls can protect themselves. Several chiefs made clear statements that certain changes were imposed by law. In 2005, Chief Tembo stated *that initiation ceremonies should include gender roles, rights, equality* [and] *that lobola should not be commercialised*, [e.g.] *women being enslaved for lifetime. This was also raised at the Royal Foundations of Chiefs Meeting in a neighbouring district last year. Also issues of review polygamy and initiation ceremonies,* he continued, *train the old ladies to sensitise the young girls to include this in the ceremonies*. The same ideas were shared at a workshop in 2006, and again the chiefs were proactive in improving the status and situation for girls.

Polygamy

When polygamy was addressed in relation to the spread of HIV/AIDS (workshop 2005) the chiefs said their policy was to *discourage polygamous marriages* (common due to the need for cheap labour when producing maize). In 2004, Chief Muyombe reiterated that *polygamy*

[is] *a hot issue. This should die out slowly. New generations should concentrate on monogamy marriages. Old habits are dying slowly.* Another HM (a former head teacher) taking the lead from his chief said that now, after his fifth marriage, he was ready to fight polygamy but added *that change does not happen overnight*.

Ritual cleansing and wife inheritance

MOE (2004) argued against sexual cleansing, as it caused the spread of the infection. The content of these ceremonies were changed during the project period to locally negotiated alternative practices that did not include sexual intercourse.

In 2005, Chiefs Chongo informed his chiefdom that there was a *declaration in the fight against HIV/AIDS [that] sexual cleansing—by proxy—kuhuta, women to women, bathing in herbs* should be followed. Chief Tembo's parliament agreed upon a ritual including *rubbing backs towards backs*, and again other initiated the practice of *washing one's hair*. These various forms of transcending the cleansing were the result of a local consensus and reflected the chiefdoms autonomy in these processes.

The outcome, as explained by Chief Chongo in 2005, is that *there is a great change going on: people are refusing sexual cleansing.* In 2006, a HM summed up some of the changes initiated by the chiefs their impact: *Chiefs made it a command that sexual cleansing should stop. Now there are rare cases, they have found alternatives.* The issue was also taken to the House of Chiefs, as Chief Tembo`s HM explained in 2006: *Traditional sexual cleansing is away. One of the main obstacles is now done away with. Now rubbing shoulders instead,* [or] *hear wash and herbal baths. In Lusaka, this was discussed, all chiefs said, each chief was asked, all have done away with it.* Getting away with sexual cleansing surely is an important step towards reducing the risk for transmission of HIV/AIDS.

Traditional medicine healers

During a monitoring visit in 2005, a teacher explained, *The problems we now face is that the orphans, when having no parental care, are mistreated, [for example] early marriages, incest and orphans are even used for sexual cleansing.* Some of the chiefs involved in the project explained the work of the healers and their responses. In Chief Mashawa`s chiefdom they *ban practice by herbalists and traditional healers when they have intercourse as payment—or [use] virgins to cleanse HIV/AIDS.*

In 2005, the senior HM to Chief Chongo said, *If anybody says that they can cure AIDS, they should be brought here.* Another HM said, *Everybody knows the view of the chief* [but] *healers are joining us very slowly. Using a razorblade twice or more. Difficult to get rid of that. If infected they blame it on witchcraft!*

Witchcraft

Already from the induction of the program, MOE staff complained about parents blaming HIV/AIDS and related deaths on witchcraft. Also in 2006, a head teacher argued, *It is difficult to get rid of. If infected, they blame it on witchcraft!* Supported by a collegue arguing

that most parents think HIV/AIDS does not exist. They blame the sickness related to HIV on witchcraft. *Some are not accepting that they are living with HIV, even if they are full-blown. They would rather say they are bewitched* (2006). As healers also used tattoos to frighten and protect against witchcraft, many chiefs discourage witchcraft while warning against the use of razorblades. Witchcraft is a culturally accepted spiritual reason for being infected.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

These local interventions coordinated through ISACA activities, which were directed towards reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS, would not have been possible without the involvement of traditional leaders as equal partners and gate openers. The various interventions created a range of formal and informal spaces for information sharing and HIV/AIDS dialogue. This was based on the acknowledgment and the value of different HIV/AIDS discourses, which allowed participants inside and outside the project to join and bring different knowledge systems when and where appropriate.

The program activities took place in different localities and environments. All were identified as boundary crossing spaces of learning. The activities took the form of multi-sectoral planning and monitoring workshops (including representatives from NGOs, MOE, traditional leaders, beneficiaries), and they involved district, school, and community-based training, planning and monitoring. All activities included the exchange of world views and experiences through the intersection of the formal government structure and the traditional leadership structure.

Engeström claims that it is useful to view society as a "multilayered network of interconnected activity systems" rather than "a pyramid of rigid structures dependent on a single center of power" (Engeström 1999:36 in Avis, 2010:153). Human agency is located in collective and dialogic practices lodged within and across activity systems acknowledging the complexity and indeterminacy that surrounds such practices (ibid). Engagement with practice is the vehicle for transformation. The fluidity of such processes and the groups involved can provide an image of stakeholder participation and empowerment implying a democratization of social relations.

This illustrates that, following Gyekye (1997) traditions and practices should not be viewed as rigidly passed from one generation to the next, but that they are the outcome of reflections and decisions about what to value and maintain. In this case, the chiefs based their interventions upon the very immediate situation - the impact of HIV/AIDS as experienced among and within their villagers - and by working with others, gaining scientific knowledge, they took steps towards changing some aspects of their traditional cultural practices in order to promote cultural practices that were more gender sensitive and supportive of their aim of reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS..

Experiences during the course of the program also showed how people, educated as well as those termed illiterate, moved between western and indigenous knowledge systems. The contribution of scientific knowledge was recognized but at the same the importance and value of traditional medicine, of spiritual beliefs and witchcraft and the practices of local healers

was reaffirmed. The longstanding commitment to this program, by the core group of stakeholders and all other actors involved, was at the basis of its impact and the changes that came about. The process, the methodology and methods applied were built upon mutual, reciprocal dialogue and respect for each other, following local protocols. Over the years trust and a spirit of ownership emerged when discussing the strategies, at all levels. The learning curves were steep and the conditions challenging but the sharing during hours and days in the field drew positive comments, constructive dialogues and laughter, an exciting academic journey.

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