

DEVELOPMENT REPORT – Television Dramas Help Save Lives*By Jill Moss*

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This is Robert Cohen with the VOA Special English Development Report.

More than three-million people died of AIDS last year. The estimate is that five-million others became infected with H.I.V., the virus that causes the disease. And there are warnings about what could happen unless much more is done to increase efforts to prevent AIDS. Right now, researchers say around forty-million people are living with the virus. The United Nations says there could be forty-five million new cases by two-thousand-ten.

Public health experts say the media have a central part to play in the fight against AIDS. They point to drama series on television and radio in a number of countries.

In Ivory Coast, for example, the weekly show “ AIDS in the City ” has been on television since nineteen-ninety-four. The program tells stories with actors in an effort to educate people about AIDS. Recently, broadcasts of the show were extended into nine other countries in West and Central Africa.



Researchers say about two-thirds of people in South Africa watch the show “ Soul City. ” This program has dealt with other social issues in addition to H.I.V/AIDS. These include violence against women and alcoholism. "Soul City" also began in nineteen-ninety-four.

A show created with BBC help has become one of India ' s most-watched dramas. In “ Detective Vijay, ” the main hero is a policeman with H.I.V. A United Nations report says the program appears to be educating people. The report says eighty-five percent of those questioned had learned something new about AIDS from the show.

But people who watch have yet to learn how Detective Vijay became infected. One of the main ways to get AIDS is through sex. Many people consider public discussion of such issues culturally unacceptable.

In China, millions watch a daily program called “ Ordinary People. ” A non-profit group based in the United States helped create this drama show about social issues. The group is called Population Communications International. P.C.I. assists governments, local groups, and radio and television stations to develop media campaigns. The group supports what it calls the magic of entertainment for social change.

P.C.I. is on the Internet at population.org. The mailing address is: P.C.I., seven-seven-seven United Nations Plaza, fifth floor, New York, New York, one-zero-zero-one-seven, U-S-A.

This VOA Special English Development Report was written by Jill Moss. This is Robert Cohen.

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