Tex4Life - Improving Health through SMS Communication

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Presentation Outline

• The Context-Health Problems & Communication Analysis.
• Project Overview
• Text4Life.
  • What it is - Description.
  • What we do - Activities.
  • What we achieve - Results.
  • What we face - Challenges.
  • What we learn - Lessons.
  • What we Need - Recommendations.
What is the Context?

- 25% not sleeping under any net (SSDI, 2012).
- 38% of pregnancy women not attending ANC as required (SSDI, 2012).
- 42% of children under-five stunted (MDHS, 2010).
- Poor hand-washing practices e.g. 62% not washing after changing babies’ nappies (SSDI, 2012).
- Low utilization of Family Planning Methods (53%); especially Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (2.2%) (SSDI, 2012).
What is the Context?

- **Mobile phones**: Urban - 85.1%, Rural - 45%, Malawi - 42%
- **Fixed phones**: Urban - 4.2%, Rural - 1%, Malawi - 0.5%
- **Television**: Urban - 46.3%, Rural - 10.9%, Malawi - 6.2%
- **Radio**: Urban - 61.7%, Rural - 44.5%, Malawi - 42.2%
- **Pay TV**: Urban - 17.8%, Rural - 2.9%, Malawi - 0.9%
- **Post Office Box**: Urban - 5.6%, Rural - 2.3%, Malawi - 1.9%

*Figure 1: Proportion of households with mobile phones, fixed phones, television, radio and post office box by place of residence.*
What is the Context?

Common Sources of Health Information in rural areas
  • Health Surveillance Assistants.
  • Radio.
  • Clinic.

Cell phone ownership is dramatically increasing even in rural areas; thus provoking fresh considerations for use of the technology in health communication.

SMS’s promise a great potential for reinforcing messages communicated through other electronic and print media (radio, posters and booklets).
What are We Doing?

• Implementing a Support for Service Delivery Integration (SSDI) Communication Project.
• Aimed at influencing normative and behavioral change for adoption of positive practices in prevention and care in six Essential Health Package areas:
  – Malaria
  – Nutrition
  – Family Planning
  – WASH (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene)
  – MNCH (Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health)
  – HIV/AIDS
MnM Brand Property

Moyo ndi mpamba

Usamalireni

A Multimedia & Multilevel Campaign
What are We Doing?

- Examples of materials
  - Mul2media Materials
  - Health Workers Flipchart
  - Family Health Booklet
  - Posters & Leaflets
  - Radio Programs
What is Text4Life?

A Continuum of Messaging
Radio Program reinforced by SMS’s
What are We Doing?

- Text4Life send messages to over 8,000 individuals per week. SMS’s cover general messages to reinforce radio program discussions.

- Text4Life communicates with Community Action Groups. Messages inquire about community initiatives aimed at promoting health positive behaviors. Communities initiatives are shared on MnM radio program (Reaching an estimated 20% of adult/youth population).

- On a small scale, Text4Life Communicates with individuals expecting a baby (over 100). Personalized messages sent according to gestation age.
What Messages?

Examples of Messages on Maternal and Child Health:

- Go to the Antenatal Care 4 times during pregnancy to prevent malaria.
- Pregnant others take iron tablets during pregnancy to prevent anemia.
What Messages?

Examples of Family Planning Messages:

• Long Acting Family Planning Methods protect you from unwanted pregnancies for up to 10 years.
• The youth have the right to access family planning methods; including Long Acting Methods.
What Messages?

Examples of Nutrition Messages:
• Pregnant women need to eat six food groups each day for good health and proper growth of the unborn baby.
What Messages?

Examples of Malaria Messages:

• Sleep under a mosquito net every night all year round to prevent malaria.
• Take at least 3 doses of SP (antimalarial medicine) during pregnancy.
What Messages?

Examples of Messages on Diarrheal Diseases:

• To prevent cholera wash hands before you prepare and eat food; and after visiting the toilet or changing a baby’s nappy.
How Do We Track Down Results?

- SMS follow up on impact.
- Telephone follow-ups to individuals and groups.
- Field visits for in-depth interviews.
What’s the Result?
Text4Life is **closing knowledge gap** on health issues. e.g. Question and Answer responses indicated their was inadequate knowledge on SP uptake during pregnancy.

Individuals testify impact on **health-seeking behaviors**.
What’s the Result?

We switched from injections to a Long Acting Method and that gave us peace of mind. This was because we listened to the Moyo ndi Mpamba radio program and received SMS’s on Long Acting Methods on the phone. The texts also reminded us of 6 food groups and that’s what we do every day- Dokotera Family, Machinga District
What’s the Result?

Innocent Amos, a teacher in Blantyre rural, receives Text4Life messages.
Innocent Amos takes Text4Life messages to class.
Text4Life induces formation of a MnM Club—Discussing sexuality, FP and the Youth and HIV
Pupils wash hands with soap at 4 crucial times and testify reduced diarrheal cases.
What’s the Result?

This made me choose a Long Acting Method and my children wash hands after visiting the toilet - Chrissy Chisiwa, Zomba District.
Mama made this and told us to wash hands after the toilet.
Phone messages have reminded me to sleep under the net and now it is my habit. Keep sending us more messages especially on family planning because we have no opportunities for the information—Mussa Flyton Chakhumbira, Dedza District.
Now I know there are six food groups; including fruits—Andre Tambala, Dedza District.
During a Cholera outbreak in January 2016, Text4Life connected Community Action Groups to a national radio program that discussed prevention and management of the disease.

- Following up initiatives.
- Magnifying impact through radio exchange.
What’s the Result?

Thank you very much. Your initiative helped me go to the clinic and receive SP (antimalarial medicine) - Text4Life Beneficiary.
My name is JS. I live at Chikweo T/C, in Machinga district, but am currently in Balaka district on a WFP Relief Food Distribution Program as a warehouse keeper. The ‘Life’s Precious’ messages that I receive through my phone are very helpful because usually I don’t have access to the radio here. I am very busy. They are also important for me because I can read them repeatedly. These messages have helped me in a number of ways. For instance, I have been reminded about hand washing and construction of toilets far from the kitchen and the water source. I have learnt about the six food groups, sleeping in a net every night to prevent malaria; and also about family planning- Text4Life Beneficiary.
What’s the Result?

My name is Louis Banda. I am Chief Chinkhadze. The messages have encouraged me to sensitize my household members and the villagers on the importance of having a toilet...and more importantly on how to construct a safe toilet- Text4Life Beneficiary.
Is it Challenging?

Like a plumber with little equipment.
Is it Challenging?

- BulkSMS software sends a short message in a single SMS. The maximum character count (160) is not enough to accommodate average principles of communication e.g. target, fact and benefit. Needed at least 200 characters in a single message.

- 1-Way BulkSMS does not receive messages. The initiative uses other platforms (e.g. FL SMS, direct modem reception) for receiving; thus not timely in managing SMS’s.

- BulkSMS not incorporating voice messaging. Creates a pro-literate bias and does not capitalize on method mix.
What Do We Learn?
What Do We Learn?

- SMS is an important tool for monitoring community mobilization initiatives. A project can conduct virtual spot checks and make targeted field visits after obtaining SMS responses.

- SMS communication is a cost effective and efficient means of communicating/dialoguing with individuals.

- SMS communication is a strong tool for reinforcing messages communicated through other channels.

- SMS communication surmounts cultural barriers that prevent the youth from accessing family planning information in public.
What’s Our Need?
- Voice-mail-based platforms (e.g. Bulk Voice Mail) for sending and receiving messages.
- Integrated digital workplace for sending and receiving messages.
- Improved length of single SMS messages (character count).
Zikomo Kwambiri! Thank you very much! Merci beaucoup!