Digital Portraits of Masculinity in Rural South Africa:
Engaging Men in Family Planning and HIV Prevention By Producing and Sharing Personal Stories

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Background/Significance

- Engaging men is key to the success of efforts to promote family planning, HIV & AIDS prevention, and gender equality.
- Sonke’s research and intervention with rural South African men shows that they often avoid visiting clinics and using condoms due to persistent beliefs about masculinity.
- Geography, poverty, language constraints, and education levels present distinct challenges to the provision/accessing appropriate of health information/services for men.
- Portrayals of men in mainstream media often suggest that all men are irresponsible and violent, which can reinforce defensive attitudes and impede change.
Intervention

• Based on the recognition that every-day stories of evolving masculinities have the potential to shift individual behaviors, community norms, and institutional policies and practices.

• Goal: to make local voices and images the centrepiece of local efforts promoting new visions of masculinity and gender equality in South Africa.

• Collaboration with Silence Speaks, an international digital storytelling initiative offering a safe, supportive environment for sharing and bearing witness to stories that too often remain unspoken, resulting in short digital videos.
Methodology

• Five workshops with adults and youth, in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo provinces.

• Practice developed at the Center for Digital Storytelling and adapted for rural settings by *Silence Speaks*; blends testimonio/oral history; participatory video/Photovoice; and popular education.

• Participants share and record stories; gather/create images; and provide input into editing/learn to edit their own stories.

• Stories are shared as part of rural education and mobilization activities carried out by Sonke Community Action Teams.
Findings/Lessons Learned

• Large-scale research project being carried out in 2010 by UCSF will assess impact of local story sharing.

• In environments where material and health needs are urgent, questions about who benefits from media-making and in what ways must be carefully addressed.

• Workshop recruitment and teaching processes must reflect close attention to ethical issues related to informed consent, safety/emotional readiness, privacy protection, and the implications of representing personal stories and bringing them into the public sphere.
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