

Evaluation Report **Red Ribbon Awards on HIV/AIDS**



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Abstract

This report presents the findings of an evaluation carried out by an independent consultant to measure the achievements, successes, weaknesses and stakeholders' perspectives of the Red Ribbon Awards on HIV/AIDS project. The Red Ribbon Awards is an annual event instituted by Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) in 2001 to identify and highlight outstanding media and community responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Nigeria.

The evaluation study was conducted by Mr. Banji Adeyanju, an experienced journalist, media researcher and independent consultant.

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Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) Nigeria is a media-based non-governmental, not-for-profit organization, with a mission to contribute to the prevention, care and control of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria by providing innovative communication and advocacy interventions that will facilitate positive behaviour change to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and mitigate its impact.

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Background to the evaluation

Since its debut in 2001, the Red Ribbon Awards project has never been independently evaluated. Although in the last two editions, the organizers have tried to fill this gap by providing evaluation forms for guests at the award ceremonies to register their perspectives about the programme, we believe that this does not substitute for an independent assessment.

In 2004, as a prelude to that year's awards, JAAIDS organized two luncheon meetings in Lagos and Abuja with groups of stakeholders including donors, awardees, representatives of the media, people living with HIV and AIDS organizations¹. Many of the recommendations made by invitees to the meetings were reflected in the awards design and content. This independent evaluation is intended to follow-up to the recommendations the stakeholder meetings. It would also address some issues such as the impact of the project, future directions and validation of its acceptance within the AIDS community.

The terms of reference for the evaluation were as follows:

1. Evaluate the impact of the Red Ribbon award project on journalists' work and on the state of AIDS reporting in Nigeria
2. Evaluate the credibility and acceptance of awards by media stakeholders including editors, line editors, reporters, media associations (NGE, NUJ, NAWOJ)
3. Make recommendations on ways of sustaining the gains and improving the credibility and acceptability of the awards
4. Ascertain the perspective of prize winners and stakeholders and the value of the awards and its importance to their work
5. Make recommendations for enhancing visibility of the awards project as well as creating wider acceptance within the media community
6. Make recommendations on the awards ceremony, including suggestions for increasing its appeal and content
7. Make recommendations on the awards categories, their relevance and appropriateness, showing evidence of consultation with media stakeholders
8. Make recommendations on the awards management and propose ways of strengthening the organizing of the awards project and retaining its integrity
9. Make general recommendations on any other aspect of the awards project.

The following methodology was proposed:

1. Desk review of awards reports for the past four years and other documentation
2. Interviews with a representative sampling of award winners over the years either by phone, email or physical contact, based on questions drawn up by JAAIDS and consultant
3. Interviews with media stakeholders including NAWOJ, NGE, and NUJ as well as line editors of prize winners or other participants at past awards ceremonies
4. Interview with some members of the award panel of judges, public and PLWH
5. Interviews with JAAIDS project staff who have been involved in managing the awards

¹ For a full report of the stakeholder meetings, please email ogechi@nigeria-aids.org

The job proved to be exacting, mainly because of the short time-frame allowed for its completion. The inflexible deadline also meant that the late responses had to be excluded. The telephone and face-to-face interviews began on Wednesday, July 27 and ended on Friday, August 12. A few responses later came via e-mail and text messages. While the vast majority of respondents were based in Lagos, relevant persons were contacted in all the geopolitical zones, although in the end, responses were received from only Ibadan, Abuja, Jos, Enugu and of course Lagos.

The responses of over 28 persons were eventually obtained. Several of them spoke on behalf of their organizations. They were PLWH, donors, award winners, journalists and editors, award judges, collaborators from NGOs and JAAIDS project staff. Not surprisingly, the face-to-face interviews provided the most material, although at least one e-mail response was also quite comprehensive.

Summary of findings

The Red Ribbon Awards (RRA) is an annual event instituted by Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) Nigeria since 2001, to recognize and encourage media excellence in HIV/AIDS reporting. Four editions of the award have held, usually around the World AIDS day in December.

Goal

To contribute to the reduction of the spread of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria by highlighting innovative media and community responses to HIV/AIDS prevention, care and control in the country.

Objectives:

- Encourage accuracy, creativity and innovation in media reporting of HIV/AIDS
- Promote best practices on HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support
- Provide incentives for increased media coverage of the epidemic
- Focus national attention on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country

Impact of the awards on journalists' work

The Red Ribbon Awards has positively and significantly affected the work of journalists in print and broadcast media in two major ways:

- It has increased aggregate media coverage of HIV/AIDS issues, and
- Enhanced the quality of media reporting of the issues.

“The impact of the RRA on the media has been appreciable. Its popularity has not waned because of its long-term, rather than short-term benefits. There is increasingly better consistency in the coverage of HIV and AIDS related issues. There is a keener interest to report the epidemic. Reporters now break and follow up on stories with greater determination, leaving fewer loose ends.”

Angles hitherto unexploited are now being harnessed; focus on existing angles is broadened even further. A point to note is the positive impact of the awards on media response to the knotty issue of stigma and discrimination.

“It has given lots of encouragement to journalists. Journalism is a thankless job but an award gingers you up as you feel appreciated and challenged. As you are not the only one writing, you are challenged to work harder when you win an award.”

Acceptance and credibility among stakeholders

The Red Ribbon Awards enjoy high acceptance among stakeholders. Judges' autonomy from JAAIDS in selecting winners has helped the credibility of the awards tremendously. However more work needs to be done to stress this division of labour between judges and JAAIDS at every opportunity.

“The credibility of RRA is not in doubt. Many people attended the December awards, the who's who in the media was there and there was no rancour. People agreed with the nominations of the judges.”

“RRA has come to be accepted. It has credibility. Around September or October, you see journalists gearing up and preparing for the awards. Just like DAME, NNMA, immediately it is announced, people start filling forms and sending in entries.”

“The entry format and setup of the entire RRA process is openly transparent and in my estimation, fair enough. Acceptance is further enhanced by the fact that an independent panel of reputable people of high integrity oversees the competition and picks winners. All these add to credibility and objectivity.”

Enhancing the awards’ visibility

There was a harvest of contributions and suggestions under this heading, especially from practicing journalists. They commonly agreed that though the award enjoys visibility in some cities, much needs to be done to improve the visibility of the awards across the country. Respondents’ main suggestions were to stage publicity-generating pre-event activities and use the media aggressively in disseminating the awards.

There were suggestions that JAAIDS cultivate the private sector and make it a partner in staging the awards, while deepening relationship with existing donors as a measure to enhance the awards’ visibility and viability.

Weaknesses and gaps

Criticisms are useful and help to avoid complacency which can be fatal to a project’s long term sustenance. The loudest criticism for RRA concerned:

- Inadequate publicity, especially in places other than Lagos and Abuja
- Prizes need to be more attractive
- Consolation prizes should be provided for runner-ups They criticized the winner-takes-all approach in which only the top-rated person in each sub-category gets a prize, while the nominees go home empty-handed.
- The competition’s guidelines should be clear and comprehensive
- Transport and accommodation expenses of all nominees based outside the city hosting the awards ceremony should be catered for by organisers

“The star prizes in the print category are not attractive enough. I’m aware of two journalists who did not feel encouraged to participate in the last award because the stakes were not high enough. While the cash prize was good enough, prizes like laptops, palmtop computers as in the radio category, would make things more competitive.”

Other Observations

1. Work with the chairmen of state councils of NUJ, NAWOJ and other NGOs so as to involve more journalists in the organization of Red Ribbon Awards.
2. JAAIDS should extend the awards to other places beyond Lagos and Abuja and increase categories to include posters, cartoons, billboards and feature articles.
3. Media-based NGOs should pool resources to stage an Investigating Reporting Award which will have an HIV/AIDS category.
4. Seek funding from the private sector, especially multinationals, and get donors to sign long-term Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs). Donors can also brand prizes.

5. Rotate the venue of the awards for national impact. Involve communication networks like MTN in a publicity campaign for RRA.
6. There should be prizes for runners-up. Cash prizes for individual category winners should be increased, especially for print media.
7. JAAIDS should tour media houses to showcase the awards.
8. The lack of publicity in the northern states should be addressed.
9. NACA and the Federal Ministry of Health should be the awards' prime sponsors.
10. JAAIDS needs year-long activities which will lead up to the RRA.
11. Don't cancel award categories because few entries were received for them.
12. Stop the delay in payment of cash prizes to award-winners.
13. Sensitization of journalists on the use of decorous language has not gone far enough.
14. Make the awards more glamorous.

**For a copy of the full evaluation report, email: ogechi@nigeria-aids.org*