

Case Study

Client	<p>A global non-profit organisation working to speed the development and distribution of preventive AIDS vaccines. In India, it operates within a tri-partite agreement with the Government of India & Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).</p>
Category	<p>Social communication/Communication for a new product category.</p>
Background	<p>The first case of AIDS in India was detected in Chennai in 1986. Since then, HIV infections have been reported in all states and union territories. In 2004, National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) estimated HIV prevalence in India at 5.1 million. Complementing the existing preventive measures, an HIV/AIDS vaccine has become an urgent need to control the burgeoning HIV epidemic in India. Hence, in December 2000, the Government of India through the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the organization to develop an AIDS vaccine specific to the strains of the virus prevalent in the country.</p> <p>In India, as a residue of the turbulent history of human trial had settled in the minds of the people. To overcome this impediment the programme had to be drafted from grassroots to educate and establish considerable support on the vaccine trials.</p>
Communication Objective	<p>The communication strategy was centered on the following objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To build awareness about AIDS vaccine• Addressing the myths associated with the vaccine.• To enhance the depth of understanding and knowledge regarding the programme, therefore enabling informed reportage.• To activate channels of communication between media and other stakeholders like NGOs, activists, scientists, government and international agencies working on HIV/AIDS and vaccine.•

Target Audience

- Indian Partners
- Policymakers in India
- NGOs
- Women's Group
- Scientific Community (like hospitals & doctors) and Research organizations
- Media
- Legislators/ethicists
- Volunteers

Opportunities/challenges

Challenges faced by us were as follows:

- India has had a very turbulent history of human trials. This gives rise to plethora of suspicion surrounding the vaccine trial.
- People considered Indians being used as 'guinea pigs' for the trials.
- Stigma and discrimination of HIV-infected people is still predominant in India, therefore preventing people to volunteer for the trials.
- Developing communication for the complex scientific process of the vaccine.
- The vaccine will take a considerable period of (6-10 years) to develop. Therefore to manage the expectation levels of the public and the media during and after this gestation period is a difficult task.

Communication Campaign

The programme was initiated with the International Policymakers Conference, where the government officials of high importance, such as the President, the Prime Minister and the Health Minister Prime, came together to address the issues surrounding the vaccine trials in India. This conference was organised to gain political advocacy to promote the vaccine trials. Further to this, a 4-tier policy and a top-down approach were adopted to implement the programme.

Research and Communication At the start, a series of qualitative studies were undertaken on issues related to the trials in India to understand some of the key

perspectives and concerns, and to develop an effective

communication policy. As a part of this communication policy, an intense media interaction on a pan India basis was undertaken, wherein the experts in the field elucidated the complex dimensions of vaccine science and the trial to the journalists.

Policy Advocacy An advisory board was created in which various NGO leaders, ethicists, and scientific community were included. The advisory board members in the long run became the spokesperson and strong advocates of the vaccine programme. National and state level political advocacy groups were formed to supervise effective planning of vaccine deployment. In additions, eminent entrepreneurs like Mr. Ratan Tata and Mr. Narayan Murthi were solicited to set up a corporate council to support the cause.

Stakeholder Meetings Attempts were initiated on the issues of accessibility, development, trials and deployment of the vaccine, besides tackling the ethical and human rights issues related to the vaccine trials. To accomplish this as well as to educate and build support, meetings with the different stakeholders were conceptualized and implemented. These meetings were directed to orient them to the science and access issues related to HIV/AIDS vaccines; solicit their support to speed development and trials; and also to assure their support in securing universal access to the vaccine as soon as it is available. Periodic media briefing sessions to educate and sensitize the media and the community both at national and regional levels on the various complex dimensions of the vaccine of HIV/AIDS were organised.

Ongoing Information Dissemination Information on vaccine awareness and programme activities were disseminated through the creation of a bi-monthly newsletter and the organization website.

**Result/
Evaluation**

Our achievements:

- President's address to the nation, on the national media, on the development and support of Anti-HIV/AIDS vaccine to prevent further spread of the disease.
- Increased awareness levels of the AIDS vaccine amongst the target audience and the public in general were measured.
- Successfully arresting the media interest towards understanding the complexities of the vaccine and its trial process. Further to this, with the help of the media, effective modes of educating the public about the vaccine were implemented.