

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

A STUDY ON TRENDS AND COMMUNICATIVE
POTENTIALS OF “DAGU” FOR HIV/AIDS
COMMUNICATION IN THE AFAR REGION

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COMMUNICATION IN THE AFAR REGION

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List of Acronyms

CSA- Central Statistical Agency

FMOH- Federal Ministry of Health

HIV- Human Immune Virus

AIDS- Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

NSS- National Sentinel Surveillance

VCT- Voluntary Counseling and Testing

BCC- Behavior Change Communication

FHI -Family Health International

CFSC -Communication for Social Change

HBM -Health Belief Model

ARRM -AIDS Risk Reduction Model

FGD- Focus Group Discussion

Abstract

This study sets out to examine trends and communicative potentials of Dagu: a folk communication process as well as a traditional medium of the Afar ethnicity. The research particularly shades light on the essence and attributes of Dagu so as to unveil its communicative potentials as a traditional HIV communication tool in the region. To this end, ethnographic methodology has been adopted to unearth if use of Dagu varies across gender, age group, among clans and across various residential addresses. The study employs interview, focus group discussion and ethnographic observations as tools for generating data from two weredas namely: Awash-Fentale and Dubti. The paper revises a number of HIV/AIDS theories, models and approaches that implicate on justifying communicative potentials of Dagu. The findings of the study show that Dagu is a traditional tool of communication that is immensely embedded in the community's day-to-day lived reality. The Afar community highly values and invariably employs Dagu as a primary channel of information exchange. The people share every important accounts of life through Dagu. Thus most people consider it more than a mere means of information exchange. They consider it as important social capital and traditional heritage to pay respect to. Various Afar proverbs testify this claim. Dagu enjoys the most frequent use by young Afar men and the most rigorous approach by elder men. Rural men make much use of Dagu compared to town men. Females and children under 15 do not use Dagu as much as others. Almost every Afar clan makes use of Dagu invariably. Given its flexible, trustworthy and liked nature of this medium which is open to synergy with other media like radio, Dagu can be effective tool for HIV/AIDS communication in this dominantly pastoral community. A keen observation skill and uniformity in information curiosity among the people to use Dagu imply its potentials. Moreover, its compatibility with old social establishments and wide acceptance across the region coupled with Dagu's room for discussion, question, and debate and above all, immediate feedback reasonably makes a potential medium to ponder to.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 A Brief Socio-demographic Account of the Afar

The Afar people are one of the Islamic pastoral communities of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. They speak a language that belongs to the lowland Cushitic linguistic family along with Somali and Oromo (Getachew, 2001:35). The Afar people reside in three sovereign countries: Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti sharing somewhat similar Islamic culture and tradition.

While the Afar comfortably call themselves as Afar People (*Qafar Umata*) their non-Afar counterparts used to call them by different names. Adali, Odali, Teltal are, for instance, names given to the Afar by their Oromo, Somali and Tigre neighbors respectively while Argoba and Amhara people some times call them Adal. Foreigners and Arabs also refer to Afar people as Danakil (Lewis, 1955:55; Getachew, 2001:35).

The Ethiopian Afar live in an area located Northeast of the country. Their region comprises of five zones and 29 districts (Weredas) covering an area of 278,000 sq.kms occupied by 22,217 urban-based households and 168, 479 rural-based households (CSA, 1996:1-3). According to the 1994 Population and Housing Census, as of July 22 1996; 1, 106 383 people were found to have lived in the region (CSA, 1999: 5). The region is dominantly composed of pastoral and semi-pastoral population out of which more than 90 percent live in rural areas (MOH, 2004/5:5).

There are two major clans with the Afar people—*Asahimara* and *Adohimara*, each containing quite a number of sub-clans (Getachew, 2001). *Asahimara* (white Afar) mainly reside north of *Gewane* while *Adohimara* (red Afar) dominantly inhabit Southern part of the region though there are cases where both live in the same localities. The researcher considers this major classification as a basic guide to collecting data from a reasonably representative portion of the Afar ethnicity.

1.1.2 Health-related Indicators with the Region

As we are dealing with HIV/AIDS communication, it seems logical to give an overview of health-related indicators in the Afar region. According to the FMOH's report on Health and Health related indicators, HIV prevalence rate for adults in 2004/5 was estimated to be 2.5 percent (1 percent for rural and 16 percent for urban/ 1.9 percent for males and 3.3 percent for females) (FMOH, 2004/5:55). Though the regional prevalence rate is lower compared to that of the national 4.6 percent (2.8 percent for rural and 12.5 percent for urban), the epidemic might have inflicted a considerable burden particularly on the rural poor who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population. Given the lower regional literacy and level of awareness, the figure may not reflect the actual one as less people are supposed to go for VCT service.

Out of the currently estimated regional population of 1, 358, 718 people, 91.1 percent live in rural places. Of this population, 16,934 (8,891 females) are estimated to be HIV positive. In 2003 alone, 513 new cases from the annual outpatient service and 106 new cases from the annual inpatient service were proved to have been HIV positive. AIDS accounted for 17 of the annual reported deaths in the region (ibid, pp. 53- 54).

With regard to population size, a household size of 5.7 is the highest in the nation next to Somali's 6.6 (ibid.p.5). When we look at the medical service indicators, there are two hospitals (one Zonal and one Regional), three private clinics, one pharmacy, four drug shops and 45 rural drug vendors in the region (ibid, p.27). Seventeen physicians, 11 Health Officers, five Pharmacists, 230 Nurses, 15 Environmental Health Workers, 26 Lab Technicians, two Radiographers, five Pharmacy Technicians and 58 Health Assistants were in duty in 2004/5 (ibid p.29).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Using word of mouth as a means of face-to-face communication is a very ancient tradition but still keeps serving particularly in traditional communities and as alternative medium of communication by the advanced ones as well. Commonly, information ranging from rumor and gossip to truthful and timely accounts of events is disseminated through this medium. But the quality and reliability of information exchanged through such a medium depends on the social value attached to the overall process and of the individual communicator.

“Dyadic communication is not only the most common communication dimension but also the one with which people are most comfortable” (Scott, M. & Brydon, S. 1977:15). Given that there is the advantage of immediate feedback, dyadic communication invites greater accuracy on interpretation of verbal and nonverbal behaviors and the need for inclusion, affection and control. On the contrary, message interpretation of such communication depends on factors related to the competence of the communicator.

Though face-to-face oral communication is the commonest type of communication, its features and the overall performance vary across culture. Afar people, for instance, heavily rely on such communication (which they call *Dagu*)

as important means of information transmission. *Dagu* is a traditional face-to-face communication of newsworthy information among the Afar and with some intimate neighboring non-Afar (*ketaisa*). Literally it is equivalent to the English word *news*.

Dagu is not considered an alternative mode of communication for Afar people as it is the case for other urban-dominated nations. It is a major means of news exchange, which is different from an ordinary face-to-face communication that include rumor and gossip as ends.

Information is highly valued among Afar people; first hand information is given even much emphasis. This fact is evident in one of their proverbs, which are part of their established oral tradition.

Dagu dina ke dagaah dina

One who lives by information makes life better than one who does not.

It is common among Afar to stop a passerby, obviously another Afar, for *Dagu*. They ask each other information regarding any current happening and it is their cultural responsibility to share the information to others promptly. No one says, "I am in a hurry" or disregards requests for current information. Within a relatively little period, the information would reach to the other boarder of the Afar depending on its importance (news value).

Afar people have traditionally developed a striking skill of observing their environment and taking mental note of events. This coupled with a keen curiosity for information, makes *Dagu* a reliable traditional news exchange mechanism. Based on his observation on Afar, Parker, E (1971:231) states:

When one is asked about his movements from A to B, it is quite illuminating to see the details which have been registered. Correct reporting is an art which must be

acquired by the men especially. This is obvious when one realizes that in the law courts, without written records, a flawless memory is absolutely essential. The council member must be able to recount exactly the spoken words of all, defendants, accusers and witnesses alike.

Parker's reflection does not only imply how effective Afar people are in noting things and effectively utilizing them in oral communication but also how culturally valued *Dagu* is as a significant life skill.

Similar to mainstream news media, *Dagu* may cover important aspects of daily life such as accidents, weddings, deaths, conflicts and their outcomes, news about well-being of herds, visitors and newcomers. Afar people may perform *Dagu* when they meet someone casually on a journey including those who travel in opposite directions. It is also possible to ask a passerby for a detailed account of his journey. Furthermore, if any newcomer happens to be in any settlement out of his home, he can be asked for news (*Dagu*) no matter how stranger he may be. *Dagu* is performed in a ritualistic process with a unique introduction and conclusion, traditional and cultural values attached. (ibid, p.232)

Most social institutions have been eroded over time and have gradually altered in some way. What was valued a few years back may not be of much relevance today. And hence, people who formerly depended on oral sources now use other means to get their information. What about *Dagu*? Is it so persistent among the Afar community regardless of the improving contact they have established with other communities which might help them to share different communication experience? Has it been given the same value among towns and rural, and across the various Afar zones? Does it have any potential to HIV/AIDS prevention campaign that has been carried out in the Afar region in particular?

To the researcher's knowledge, no investigation has been made to answer the above questions. Furthermore, there are only few journalistic articles on *Dagu*. That *Dagu* is little studied inspired the researcher to explore the trends of this generations-old experience. Hence, it is the researcher's plan to explore the communicative potential of *Dagu* regarding HIV/AIDS prevention initiative in the Afar region. Thus, the research tries to explore whether use of *Dagu* differs among clans, across genders, or age groups.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 General objectives:

The study aims at exploring existing trends in the use of *Dagu* among different socio-demographic groups of the Afar people. It also tries to assess some attributes and potential of *Dagu* as a communication tool with regard to HIV/AIDS interventions in the region.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The research tries to:

- unveil the essence of *Dagu* in the Afar culture and traditions.
- analyze certain attributes of *Dagu* as a traditional means/ channel of communication.
- examine whether use of *Dagu* varies across age and gender, urban and rural places as well as between *Asahimara* and *Adohimara* Afar.
- explore the potential of *Dagu* as a tool for HIV/AIDS communication in the Afar Community.

1.4 Research Questions

This research is expected to answer the following questions so as to meet the aforementioned objectives:

- What social and/or cultural value has been given to *Dagu* by various sections of the Afar people?
- Is there any considerable variation in the community's use of *Dagu* across various variables like residence places, clan groups, across gender and age?
- What potential does *Dagu* have as a tool for HIV/AIDS communication in the Afar region?

1.5 Application of Results

The study is expected to have the following significances:

- It would point out to health communicators in the region about potentials of *Dagu* in facilitating HIV/AIDS prevention endeavors.
- It tries to highlight the importance of considering *Dagu* as a relevant tool in a culture-sensitive health communication in a context of predominantly mobile pastoral community.
- It gives theoretical insight regarding the importance of taking up alternative approach to HIV communication in traditional settings such as the Afar region.
- It shades light on the social custom of the Afar people particularly regarding means of information exchange. And hence it benefits people who are likely to have contact with the host community in an intercultural context thereby helping guests to handle effective communication.
- The research may also provoke similar attempts of further investigation on the area thereby building additional body of knowledge.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

This study has been limited by time and money. Time has particularly been the major limiting factor in this research which required extensive field work and various methods.

Moreover, the researcher's lack of enough linguistic and cultural background of the Afar ethnicity is supposed to have a bit of impact as interviews (both individual and group) were conducted and interpreted with the help of bilingual data collectors/interpreter who can speak Afar and Amharic languages.

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

This research tries to explore trends of using *Dagu* so as to evaluate its potentials for HIV/AIDS communication in the Afar region. It does not look into ways of implementing *Dagu* as a tool for HIV/AIDS communication. This project focused on two weredas (districts) of the Afar region namely: *Awash-Fentale* district of zone three where *Adohimara* Afar reside and *Semera* of zone one which is inhabited by *Asahimara* Afar. These two Weredas can fairly represent the region.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

This study pays attention to trends and communicative potentials of Dagu as a traditional tool for HIV/AIDS communication in the Afar region. It investigates how Dagu is being used among the different socio-demographic groups of the Afar communities. Particular emphasis has been given to various aspects of Dagu: its social position, its degree of involving different parts of the community, the traditional roles and social values attached to it. Most importantly, *Dagu's* potential as a tool for HIV/AIDS communication has been the focus of this study.

This chapter presents a review of various HIV/AIDS communication approaches, theories and models. The approaches, theories and models are categorized and a critical reflection on their suitability to the context of the study is discussed. Based on the existing trends of Dagu use and its relevance to the existing social setup in the Afar community, concepts that can justify communicative potentials of Dagu, will be noted from the approaches, theories and models of communication revised.

2.1 Status of HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia: A brief Overview

According to the fifth report of "AIDS in Ethiopia" series that analyses the 2003 National Sentinel Surveillance (NSS) data, 1.5 million people (3.8 percent male and 5 percent female; 12.6 percent urban and 2.6 rural) were living with HIV/AIDS. Out of this population 96,000 are children under 15 years. In 2003 alone, 98,000 new adult HIV cases and 25,000 new child HIV cases were estimated to have existed. In the same year, some 90,000 adults and 25,000 children had died of AIDS (MOH, June 2004: V).

According to the report mentioned above, “the urban epidemic has leveled off at a high prevalence rate in the past few years, while the rural epidemic shows a gradual increase with reduced rate of progression”. The national trend has also showed a gradual increase following a rise in the rural trend (ibid. p. 21). With lack of uniform access to Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) Services in countryside, the rural prevalence rate might be underestimated. Even so, life expectancy for both persons living with and without HIV/AIDS through 1998-2008 is estimated to decrease by 4.6 years (ibid. p. 17).

While the national HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is among the highest in the world, more rural people are currently being infected. This creates a major concern. UNAIDS and WHO, in a jointly organized report, said, “in a society where 85 percent of the population lives in rural areas, rising adult prevalence in rural areas (up from 1.9 in 2000 to 2.6 in 2003) gives cause for concern” (UNAIDS and WHO, December 2005:28).

The adult HIV prevalence rate in the Afar region was estimated to have been 2.5 percent (1 percent to rural and 16.4 percent accounting to town) in 2004/5. Out of this figure, 1.9 percent accounts to males while 3.3 percent was contained by females (MOH, 2004/5:55). Ninety percent of the population in the region are composed of rural pastoralists whose lifestyle is characterized by frequent mobility and occasional separation from family in search of pasture. This mobility probably aggravates risk behavior. The Afar people exhibit lifestyle and social dynamic different from their counterparts in the central highlands. This may necessitate a different approach to HIV communication which aligns with social realities pertinent to the region.

2.2 HIV/AIDS Communication

HIV/AIDS communication “refers to programs or activities where the primary output is communication rather than the provision of services, treatments or commodities such as condoms” (Eldis, n.d.). HIV/AIDS communication does not refer to the communication aspect of all programs, but rather to a number of specific approaches, methods and a rapidly evolving body of knowledge applied to major steps and processes taken in containing the epidemic (ibid.).

2.2.1 Conceptual Framework

Communication was originally conceptualized as a simple one-way transmission of messages from a source to receiver with the intention of producing some effect (Rogers, 1973 as quoted in Piotrow, P. et al, 1997:17). The intended effect was usually limited to making the receiver aware of some point of view, an innovation or course of action. Neither the social process of communication nor its effect on behavior received enough attention. Rather message transmitted were considered to have been received, thereby leading communicators to produce a large volume of materials without careful attention to the various social, cultural and structural variables that affect the receiver’s ways of interpretation.

Recently, however, a framework of communication cognizant of those factors has evolved and expanded dramatically in response to various theories drawn by scholars of social science and humanities among others (ibid. p. 17). With such evolution, both the definition of communication and the place and role of audiences in the communication process have been more clearly explained. Communication is no longer understood as a simple one-way process of message transmission nor as a bi-directional exchange of information but as a complex many-to-many process where attention must be paid to sender, receiver and structural factors in the process if effective outcome is expected.

Currently communication is understood as a process that tends to employ several complex variables especially in the context of health communication in general and HIV/AIDS communication in particular. The reason is that health communication especially aims at more demanding outputs such as behavior change and modification of some social and political factors that influence behaviors in some way (Hubley, J., 1993:47). At times this process may require a major change in an individual's or a community's socio-cultural norms that have been valued for generations. Such attempt of challenging deep-rooted social or cultural behaviors is not a simple task for communicators and cannot be achieved overnight even if its effect is constructive to a given society.

If we take HIV/AIDS communication, for instance, awareness creation or information transmission alone could not guarantee success to tackling the epidemic. The fight against HIV/AIDS is as complex as its causes and hence requires a range of communicative approaches that must take specific account of various social, economic, cultural and political backgrounds of the given community. Change in behavior is at the heart of HIV/AIDS communication. And such a change requires both individual and social commitment. There is not any prescribed universal model of communication, which can be employed to effectively reduce risk of HIV and AIDS. Hence any communication approach that best fits to various socio-cultural aspects of a given society could be individually or jointly employed.

Accordingly, the major target of this ethnographic research is to study trends of Dagu as it has been used in the Afar community and to analyze its communicative potential as a tool for HIV/AIDS communication in the region, paying particular attention to the Afar people. In doing so, various HIV/AIDS communication approaches, models and theories that either justify or contrast to Dagu as communication tool for pastoral and semi-pastoral communities in Afar

have been noted and reviewed.

In this study, the researcher is guided by the assumption that HIV communication in the Afar region is less contextualized in terms of employing approaches and media or messages that best fit to the overall needs and preferences of the community. HIV communication in the Afar region is characterized by lack of region-based HIV communication strategy and undue concentration on town-based communication interventions, which hardly address the rural majority.

It is in this light that the research tries to study communicative potential of *Dagu* for HIV/AIDS communication in the Afar region giving special emphasis to the Afar community that constitutes the major portion of the population in the region.

2.2.2 The Need for HIV/AIDS Communication

According to UNAIDS, AIDS is an exceptional disease with a unique capacity to reverse decades of development progress in high HIV prevalence countries. Its potential area of influence on the most economically productive portion of the society exerts a great deal of stress for crippling economies (UNAIDS, 2005: 180).

Being one of the global threats, HIV/ AIDS requires integrated strategic responses to trimming it. The responses to curbing dangers of AIDS are as complex as the causes are. Neither extensive distribution of condoms nor antiretroviral therapy is a universal remedy. Contextualized and community-specific interventions drawn from continuous local and international lessons learned and community mobilization for integrated endeavors are among the commonly practiced steps that have been taken currently (ibid.). Communication is the foremost preventive strategy.

Moreover, absence of medicine or vaccination and lack of abundant resource that constrains medical interventions necessitates cost effective preventive interventions. Thus HIV/AIDS communication, though not a “magic formula”, is assumed to play a crucial role in efforts to fight the epidemic (ibid.). Prevention interventions, in general and communication in particular are among cost-effective interventions to tackling HIV and AIDS. Emphasizing the major role communication plays in this regard, Panos (2003) states:

While major breakthroughs, both in types and costs of treatment, are transforming the response to AIDS, and giving new hope to HIV-positive people, communication continues to hold the key to containing HIV transmission and coping with the effects of the pandemic.

Basic information such as factors contributing to HIV risk behavior, means of transmission, the necessity of voluntary counseling and testing or knowledge of life skills needed to avoid risk factors can be acquired and exchanged through communication. Hence communication is the foremost strategy to lead preventive interventions.

2.2.3 HIV/AIDS Communication Approaches

For a few decades now, HIV/AIDS Communication has evolved to come up with a variety of approaches some of which focus on change in behavior at the individual level while others pay much attention to social change. Below is a critical review of some of the dominant approaches of HIV/AIDS communication that are thought to be relevant to the study. Some of the approaches carry overlapping concepts and hence are not mutually exclusive.

However, UNFPA (2002) classifies the approaches into three major categories as approaches focusing on individual behavior change, those which focus on social change and those which focus on advocacy. Each approach has a certain specific socio-cultural and environmental setup where it can serve better than others. While it is common among various multilateral organizations to favor communication targeting social change, this approach also seem to be highly relevant to countries like Ethiopia where there is a relatively stronger communal social strand.

Thus, a focus on the social change communication approach and advocacy communication approach seem more likely to evoke on-going response to an ever-growing threat like HIV/AIDS. Those approaches aiming at empowering societies to come together, discuss their problems and causes of HIV transmission to find out agreed upon and relevant solutions that basically rely on local resources than foreign donations bring better result. Factors like poverty, gender imbalance, marginalization and ignorance, which are considered to aggravate transmission of HIV, are better simultaneously addressed through advocacy and social change approaches which aim at motivating collective action.

2.2.3.1 Behavior Change Communication (BCC)

According to a definition given by Media Center of Family Health International (FHI), "Behavior Change Communication (BCC) is a multi-level tool for promoting and sustaining risk-reducing behavior change in individuals and communities by distributing tailored health messages in a variety of communication channels" (FHI, 2005).

This approach assumes that people should be given basic facts about HIV and AIDS, should be taught a set of protective skills and given access to appropriate services and products so as to help them perceive their environment to be supportive of changing or maintaining safe behaviors. It believes that people should understand the urgency of the epidemic before they can reduce their risk or vulnerability to HIV (ibid.). BCC strategies in HIV/AIDS aim to create a demand for information and services relevant to preventing HIV transmission, and to facilitate and promote access to care and support services.

The strength of BCC is that it employs a network of communication tools instead of using a single communication channel so as to effectively address as large a portion of a society as possible. Communication here is perceived as integrated and ongoing process, which can initiate change in behavior at an individual and thereby at a community level.

This approach assumes designing messages that aim at individual behavioral change could bring about cumulative change at a macro level. What it does not consider is that the required change in individual behavior is likely to be affected by social, environmental and structural factors.

2.2.3.2 A Shift in Focus of Communication: from Behavior Change to Social Change

In recent years, there has been a growing shift in the emphasis of AIDS communication interventions from which is reflected in an explicit focus on the 'social' or 'community', rather than the 'individual' (UNAIDS, 1999; Panos, 2002; Panos, 2003 as cited in DFID, 2005:8). This shape arose out of an argument that behavior change communication (BCC) focuses on a better understanding of individual sexual risk taking behavior and fails to locate individuals within communities and environments that may constrain individual action and change (UNAIDS, 1999 as cited in ibid.)

In line with this, UNAIDS argues:

seeking to influence behavior alone is inefficient if the underlying social factors that shape the behavior remain unchallenged. Many health communication programs proceed on the assumption that behavior, alone, needs to be changed, when in reality, such a change is unlikely to be sustainable without incurring some minimum of social change. This necessitates attention to social and environmental contexts (1999: 21).

As it has been reflected in the above literature, BCC is often a western-focused approach that exclusively aims at individuals. Such approaches might have worked in the case of individual-oriented western societies, which bear a different social philosophy. But the reality for most communities living in poor countries like Ethiopia remains one of the great senses of collectivity, unity and coercion. This entails to recheck or reshuffle BCC in a way that its methods be more structure sensitive so as to give better recognition to community ownership of the intervention and to address structural impediments like illiteracy and gender inequality. Communication for social change aims at filling in this gap.

Unlike a sender-receiver, information-based premise, communication for social change stresses the importance of horizontal communication, the role of people as agents of change, and the need for negotiating skills and partnership. In a process of public and private dialogue, politically and economically marginalized people define who they are, what they want and need, and how to attain what they need to better their lives. Change is defined as the people themselves define it (UNFPA, 2002: 44).

The focus of Communication for Social Change (CFSC) is not on products, messages, content, information dissemination or even the desired behavior change, but on the process of dialogue through which people can remove obstacles and build structures and methods to help them achieve the goals they set for themselves. CFSC seeks to understand the whole person, the lives they lead and circumstances in which they live, not just in order to “overcome” their life experiences but to build upon them (ibid.).

2.2.3.3 Broad-Based Multi-method Approach to AIDS

communication

Broad based multi method approach is an AIDS communication “approach which doesn’t rely on a single communication methodology or channel which takes into account people’s real lives and what influences them and which is linked to and support the delivery of health services and essential commodities” (DFID, 2005:4).

This approach involves methods of communication ranging from mass media efforts to promote condoms to targeting risk-taking behavior using edutainment programs. It may also include numerous participatory and interpersonal interventions that contribute to the creation of information-rich environment whereby HIV prevention, AIDS treatment and care efforts are enabled or strengthened and stigma be reduced. This approach recognizes the role of mass media and civil society in trimming dangers of AIDS and in shaping policies to be favorable to the fight against HIV/AIDS through creating open debate and dialogue to address issues of stigma and inequality and challenging harmful social norms contributing to the risk. (Ibid.).

2.2.3.4 Participatory Communication Approach and HIV/AIDS

Participatory Communication is an approach evolved from the earlier transmission model of communication, where information was assumed to pass from senders to receivers. It is an approach emanated from the widely growing democratic principles and criticism of the earlier top-down and expert-dictated communication approaches. As one development communication practitioner puts it, 'development communication has largely remained a strategy of unidirectional marketing and monologue' (Rajasunderam, n.d.).

During the last decade or so, there has been a gradual shift from this hierarchical, top-down view of communication to a deeper understanding of communication as a two-way process that is interactive and participatory. This change in perception about the nature of the communication process is working in favor of a more participatory decision-making at the local level and of communication as a part of the process. Some development communication practitioners have promoted the concept of community participation as an educational process in which communities, with the assistance of animators or facilitators, identify their problems and needs, and become agents of their own development (ibid.).

There is now increasing recognition among development practitioners and planners working with HIV/AIDS and other development interventions that participatory communication is the "most promising approach for decreasing dependency, building self-confidence and self-reliance of the people" (Rajasunderam, nd.).

Participatory communication approach believes in putting the community at the center of the communication process by encouraging community participation in major points of the planned intervention. However, critics forward two major doubts as to what is in a stake as far as participatory communication is concerned.

The major criticism is that this approach tends to promote false or superficial participation at the expense of involving advanced, real and legitimate participation which allows the community to involve in decision making on every stage of the intervention if not on implementation, evaluation and benefit alone. These critics also feel that prematurely mobilizing people to make their own decisions and chart their own development can put the people at risk of conflict with powerful interests and jeopardize their safety. (Yoon, n.d.).

Regarding importance of this approach, however, Yoon says:

Most people agree that participation in decision-making is the most important form to promote. It gives people control over their lives and environment. At the same time, the people acquire problem-solving skills and acquire full ownership of projects – two important elements which will contribute towards securing the sustained development of their community (ibid.).

The emphasis on interpersonal approaches at first suggested a small-scale, community-based approach to participatory communication. Speech, traditional and folk media, and group activities were considered the most appropriate instruments for supporting the approach. Recently, however, media practitioners have begun creative involvement in the process. And hence there are possibilities of implementing mass media to help promote the participation process (Rogers, 1983). Communication in this sense is seen as an instrument to empower the people rather than as a mere vehicle for moving information.

2.2.3.5 Advocacy Communication Approach

McKee et al. (2004), provide a detailed and explicit definition for advocacy as:

a continuous and adaptive process of gathering, organizing and formulating information into argument to be communicated through various interpersonal and media channels with a view to raising resources or gaining political and social leadership acceptance and commitment for

a development program, thereby preparing a society for its acceptance(McKee et al, quoted in McKee et al., 2004:56).

UNFPA defines advocacy in a conceptually similar manner as:

attempts to influence the political climate, policy and program decisions, public perceptions of social norms, funding determinations and community support and empowerment towards specific issues through a set of well planned and organized actions undertaken by a group of committed individuals and/or organizations working in concert(2002:56).

As it can be noted from the above two definitions, advocacy is a well-thought, integrated and planned process which aims at positively influencing various socio-cultural aspects such as gender relations, spirituality and bad cultural practices; institutional aspects; resource units and solidarity networks in a way they can be positively adjusted to help efforts to curb HIV and AIDS. It is a “process-driven” if not an “event-oriented” approach to HIV/AIDS communication.

Advocacy may include proactive lobbying for parliament debates on issues related to government commitment and effort to make AIDS a national agenda or society’s need to rethink cultural practices which contribute to the development or sustainability of HIV risk behavior. It is also important to advocate for open dialogue and use role models to bring-out HIV/AIDS in a positive manner. Actions and physical demonstrations such as caring for the sick, acceptance, showing affection and care to those infected and affected, including orphans, and breaking the “us and them” barrier can be a powerful means of communication advocacy. Advocacy has been considered as a “vehicle to achieve social change” (UNFPA, 2002).

While advocacy is an important approach to HIV/AIDS communication, it, alone, cannot lead to empowerment. There is a need for an integrated approach bringing together all strands of communication, stressing on the centrality of behavior and addressing the different needs and concerns of organizations as well as individuals (ibid. p. 59). Advocates use means of communication ranging from mass media to informal interpersonal network with people whom they feel are influential in some way to motivate people to act according to what the planned interventions demands.

Advocacy, which is considered as the final stage in BCC, differs from advocacy communication in the sense that the former operates at the individual level, while the latter is the collective dimension. It is that collective dimension which fills the gap between BCC and CFSC (ibid. p. 53). Cohen, as cited in UNFPA, argues that the primary goal of advocacy is creating an enabling and supportive environment even if the environment is not always something to act upon for it includes unfavorable social and political contexts (ibid, p.54). Similar to CFSC, Advocacy communication is a long-term intervention, which requires a rigorous evaluation of impacts.

2.2.4 Theories and Models Adapted to HIV/AIDS Interventions and their Implications to Communication

Since the 1980s where HIV/AIDS was identified as one of the major health challenges with no vaccination or cure, various theories and models have been adapted from psychology, development and other disciplines so as to help interventions meant to trim the aggressive transmission of the virus, especially in the first two decades of the history of the epidemic. These theories and models differ in their emphasis. Many of them focus on bringing behavioral change at the individual level while a few of them target a comprehensive and sustainable change in the social and political setup so as to make preventive and other

HIV/AIDS related efforts do well.

A couple of models and theories from both the individual-oriented category and from those aiming at bringing social change at a macro level have been reviewed in this part. The purpose of this review is neither to defend one theory or model over the other nor to test the relative advantage of one over the other. However, the review is assumed to implicate theoretical elements, which can be used to justify communicative potential of Dagu as an HIV communication tool in a context of predominantly pastoral or semi-pastoral community. Hence communication aspects of Dagu will be examined in light of the approaches, theories and models that have been reviewed in this chapter so as to make an informed analysis.

2.2.4.1 Health Belief Model (HBM)

The Health Belief Model (HBM) is a psychological model that attempts to explicate and predict health behaviors by focusing on the attitudes and beliefs of individuals. The HBM was developed in the 1950s as part of an effort by social psychologists in the United States Public Health Service to explain the lack of public participation in health screening and prevention programs (e.g., a free and conveniently located tuberculosis screening project using x-ray). Since then, the HBM has been adapted to explore a variety of long- and short-term health behaviors, including sexual risk behaviors and the transmission of HIV/AIDS (The Communication Initiative, 2003 and FHI, 2004).

According to this model, change in behavior is a factor of variables such as perceived threat, perceived benefits of the change, perceived barriers, cues to action and self-efficacy. This model considers people as rational beings who can observe their environment and develop the right behavior, which is likely to avoid health threats.

Communication is, therefore, considered as a tool which is meant to make people aware of things like the degree of susceptibility to health risks, how severe the risk is likely to be if not tackled, how much benefit they may receive if they adopt a certain behavior, the potential negative consequences that may result from taking a particular health related action and the degree of confidence an individual develops in executing a certain behavior required to produce desired outcome.

Neglecting issues like environmental or economic factors that may influence health behaviors and failure to incorporate the influence of social norms and peer on people's decisions regarding their health behaviors have been mentioned as drawback of this model that are worth considering especially when working with adolescents on HIV/ AIDS issues (FHI, 2003).

2.2.4.2 AIDS Risk Reduction Model (ARRM)

Introduced in 1990, the AIDS Risk Reduction Model (ARRM) provides a framework for explaining and predicting the behavior change efforts of individuals specifically in relationship to the sexual transmission of HIV/ AIDS. It is a three-stage model, which incorporates several variables from other behavior change theories, including the Health Belief Model, "efficacy" theory, emotional influences, and interpersonal processes (FHI, 2004).

AIDS Risk Reduction Model (ARRM) identified three major stages an individual faces in the course of change in behavior (ibid.). These are:

Stage 1: Recognition and labeling of one's behavior as high risk;

Stage 2: Making a commitment to reduce high-risk sexual contacts

and to increase low-risk activities; and Stage 3: Taking action. This model assumes that people will measure the pros and cons of developing a certain behavior based on the information, knowledge and skills they have had about

risks of HIV and AIDS. People are assumed to rationally analyze the cost and benefit of sustaining or reducing risky sexual activities based on various factors (mainly psychological and to some extent socio-cultural and environmental).

Like what is the case in the Health Belief Model (HBM), communication in ARRM is viewed as transmission of information and experiences either from health professionals or peers to individuals so as to help them take calculated actions regarding whether to change their behavior in a way that health risk could be reduced. Unlike the Communication for Social Change Model (CFSC), ARRM focuses on output of communication but not much on the process.

A general limitation of the ARRM is its focus on individual (ibid.) while focusing on individual may bring about the required change in behavior, it is not a full proof for change in behavior is likely to be affected by the different socio-cultural and environmental factors, which are ignored by this model.

2.2.4.3 Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Diffusion, according to Rogers - the father of diffusion theory, is “a particular type of communication in which the information that is exchanged is concerned with new ideas. The essence of the diffusion process is the information exchange by which one individual communicates a new idea to one or several others” (Rogers, 1983:17). The communication process in this model involves at least four important elements: an innovation, an individual or other unit of adoption that has knowledge of or experience with using the innovation, another individual or unit that does not have knowledge of the innovation and a communication channel connecting the two units (ibid.).

While various channels of communication ranging from interpersonal to mass media can be used for diffusing the innovation, the choice differs with the nature

of innovation and the nature of information exchange between the communicators. However, interpersonal communication seems effective in facilitating the innovation whereas; mass media can help rapidly disseminating the innovation to many. In favor of this Nwosu says, “[diffusion] focuses on interpersonal interaction among adopters of an innovation within a specific social system, and the role communication plays in this process. The end result of the process is either structural or functional changes in the system itself” (Nwosu et al., 1995:23).

By innovation, in this context, Rogers mean that certain degree of uncertainty is involved in the diffusion process, not necessarily because the innovation is completely alien but may be due to the fact that people did not try it before. (Rogers, 1983:6)

Though the communication process in this model assumes a change agent to play basic role in creating curiosity and in convincing them to adopt the innovations, there should not be heterophilous relationship between the change agent and the potential adopters so that effective communication be maintained (pp. 18-19). The more similar attributes communicators do have the more likely that the change agent influences the adopter.

Diffusion is, therefore, a special process by which an innovation (obviously new idea, material or any creativity) is communicated through certain channels overtime among the members of a social system so as to convince people adopt it. Communication, in this sense, is a social process by which participants create and share information with one another so as to reach on mutual understanding. It is not at all a one way process of information transmission (ibid.pp.5-6). Generally, communication is taken as a tool that facilitates a range of steps in the diffusion process such as providing knowledge, persuading adopters, helping decision

making of adopters so as to implement the innovation and confirm its benefits to others. Communication is not considered a panacea. Diffusion, as well, is not an activity to be accomplished overnight.

2.2.4.4 Communication for Social Change Model (CFSC)

Communication for Social Change (CFSC) has been defined as “a process of public and private dialogue through which people define who they are, what they want and how they can get it” (Gray-Felder and Dean, 1999; cited in Figueroa, et al., 2002:II). It is a participatory process that allows communities to articulate their values, reconcile disparate interests and act upon shared concerns (Reardon, C. 2003:1). Hence, it just puts people at the center of an intervention. It has been difficult to make distinction between CFSC as an approach and as a model as both are defined similarly in some of the existing literatures.

Based on the philosophies of Paulo Friere, the Brazilian educator who contends that everyone must be agent for ones own change, CFSC argues that sustainability of social change is more likely if the individuals and communities most affected own the process and content of communication. “...when communities articulate their own agendas, they are more likely to achieve positive changes in attitudes, behaviors and access to opportunities. What is more, because they are highly invested in the process, they are more apt to sustain these gains” (ibid. p. 2).

While a certain outcome such as adopting a healthy sexual behavior or social norm is emphasized in case of CFSC, the process of participation, dialogue and debate is equally focused. Communication, in this case, is not considered as a product to measure its extent; it is rather considered as a means to an end. Here, the aim is to bring all individuals or “rights holders” into the process of decision-making about HIV and AIDS. Communicators, as well, are not

considered as persuaders, as mere information senders or as outsider technical experts who give “valuable” information to the community in a “top-down” manner. They are rather considered as active and interactive agents who catalyze and guide the debate, dialogue and negotiation of the community so as to see them reach at consensus.

The “emphasis on outcomes should go beyond individual behavior to social norm, policies, culture and supporting environment”, unlike what has been the case in individual-oriented models such as health belief model, social learning theory and AIDS risk reduction model (Figueroa, et al., 2002:II).

Since communication for social change involves both horizontal and top-down interaction among participants, it is more likely to give voice to previously unheard members of the community. In this sense it considers the role of empowering participants who are otherwise incapacitated.

Communication, in case of CFSC, is not a “magic bullet” for social change. It only constitutes part of the real solution. It can help enable people to shape their own agenda, articulate their own priorities and aspirations of how to address the epidemic, and ensure that concerned stakeholders such as donors are responding to public and policy debates as well as shaping such debates (Rockefeller Foundation 2001, cited in Capobianco, nd.).

Because it engages people in dialogue about difficult issues, it can be slow and unpredictable. It can also be difficult to evaluate. Communicators use the communication for social change methods to spark public and private dialogue, set an agenda, frame public debates and create an environment that is conducive to change (Reardon, 2003:1).

2.3 HIV/AIDS and Indigenous Media and Communication

2.3.1 Indigenous/ Folk media: Definition

It has been difficult to give a lucid definition of indigenous media based on existing literature as different scholars mystified the concept by treating it differently. Some people such as Awa (1995:237-52) prefer using the terms traditional media, folk media and indigenous media interchangeably accepting the subtle conceptual distinction they have while others treat them differently. Hence it seems safe to put the term in context using various explanations so as to understand its essence.

For the purpose of this study, we better use the terms traditional media, folk media or indigenous media interchangeably, as Awa did, under the framework of the following definition given by Theuri.

Folk Media is the creative dissemination of information through cultural and performance arts. In traditional societies, folk media: drama, skits, poems, stories, riddles, songs and dance have been popularly and successfully used to disseminate messages and even to pass on wisdom of older generations to the youth (2004).

Awa, referring to works of various African scholars, states that cultural entities such as oral songs meant to express praise, condemnation, disappointment, romance, jealousy and satisfaction can be considered as aspects of traditional media (1995:238). Traditional media in this specific context refer to means of communication used by traditional people who are dominantly oral-aural. These media are highly rooted in that specific culture they are in and are often paid due attention by the local people as they are the major means of transmitting and negotiating indigenous knowledge and information to the people.

2.3.2 Cultural Significance and Communicative Potentials of Traditional/Folk Media for HIV/ AIDS Communication

While models and theories in the earlier paradigms of communication such as “stimulus-response model” and “modernization” theory neglected the meanings and values of traditional knowledge, the current paradigms have given them credit. Practically, however, “potential [of traditional media] for effecting social change has never been realized” (Johnny and Richards, 1980 as cited in *ibid.* p. 242).

Emphasizing on the significance of traditional media Awa says, “several scholars and researchers have highlighted the usefulness and centrality of traditional media in information transfer, message design, and planning and development in traditional social context (1995:238)”. According to his view, traditional media incorporate indigenous elements that have traditional legitimacy for participants in development programs and hence serve multiple functions like involving, entertaining, instructing and informing the society (*ibid.*).

Indigenous knowledge and skills have been stored in human memory and have been transmitted from generation to generation through traditional media particularly in the context of developing African societies. Knowledgeable elder people play major role in sustaining transmission of these social wealth. Due to this fact, the death of a knowledgeable old person has commonly been equated with “disappearance of a well-organized library” (*ibid.* p.239). Thus both the way traditional wisdom is transmitted through folk media accompanied by various ceremonies and rituals pertinent to a given culture and the communicators in charge of that duty have been given a respected social position in traditional societies.

Changing a certain negative aspect of traditional people such as HIV risk behavior requires understanding of traditional strategies. In this regard, Ibrahim Ame on his study conducted on traditional Borana pastoralists, argues: "The many multifaceted social vices Ethiopia is indulged in can hardly be managed without the better understanding of the socio-cultural basis of different traditional practices still intact among traditional communities" (2005:4). These traditional practices are better absorbed and presented in traditional media by which the people share their views and experiences in a day-to-day basis. According to Awa, the oral tradition, which is part and parcel of traditional media, does more than inform, persuade and entertain villagers (1995:240). Thus local communities better recognize message transmitted through these traditional media, which are both familiar and trustworthy. In favor of this, Rogers (1983) contends that innovations (messages) presented by homophilic sources (those who are like the receivers) are better accepted and shared as they are more likely to reflect the communities experiences and problems as seen through their own cultural lens. Traditional media such as tales, proverbs, drama, storytelling and the like best fits the purpose of involving a homophilic communicator and letting the message be better trusted.

Part of the effectiveness of traditional media, in such contexts, lies in the nature of the social network. Feliciano (1974), as cited in Awa, mentions the importance of rural communication networks operated by village elders, councils and other informal groups in legitimizing and transmitting new ideas and practices. "These networks perform well because of the presence of effective interpersonal channels" (1995:239).

Folk media are the integral part of indigenous culture. The way communication progresses, the language and the style employed, the rituals and the non-verbal behaviors used are all functions of that specific culture. Therefore, "adapting

development information to the forms that villagers have used for generations, using culture as a foundation for rather than a barrier to change” is acceptable (Colletta, 1980, as cited in Awa, 1995:242).

Awa mentioned various successful cases in Africa whereby different traditional media such as dance, music, chant, storytelling, puppetry and theatrical performance have been used either individually or in an integrated manner to disseminate development ideas and messages (1995:240- 1).

Regardless of awareness of their advantages, folk media have been underexploited for development activities (Johnny and Richards, 1980 cited in *ibid.* p 242). While folk media have been readily available for use with a slight creative adaptation, modern media have surpassed them. The reason for this may be the fact that most communication theories have been formulated in the context of western countries, which bear a different socio-cultural, economic and structural fabric from African countries thereby following communication approaches which are biased towards mass media.

Awa recommends designers of development programs in developing countries to conceptualize interventions from a “holistic” point of view using the community rather than the individual as the prime unit of intervention. He further suggests that “understanding of traditional values, indigenous roles and leadership patterns, local organizations and other informal associations and the flow of influence and information between these elements as well as the linkage between these systems and other social systems” must be taken into consideration when planning a certain development communication intervention (*ibid.* p. 242).

According to Esman and Uphoff (1984), traditional institutions, when fully understood, may play a very useful role in rural development (*ibid.* 243). In

many developing countries a group of people like psychic healers, herbalists, traditional birth attendants, recounters and traditional diviners serve as indigenous media channels to disseminate potential information which can lead to new understanding, new knowledge or collective action to solve a certain social problem (ibid. p. 243). Hence folk media can play potential role in the fight against HIV and AIDS by engaging majority of the population to address the multifaceted causes leading to such a risk.

In connection with this, Riley (1990) points to the untapped potentials of indigenous resources in developing countries for promoting a primary health care among the people in rural communities. However, she also regrets about the lack of attention given to indigenous social structure and communication systems due to excessive dependence of various African governments on outside agencies and the undue attention given to those agencies (Cited in Awa, 1995:243- 4).

2.3.3 Integrating Traditional Media and Mass Media Messages

“Traditional media can be combined to mass media not only to expand outreach to audiences but also to preserve these media and enrich their repertoire” Valbuena (1991) cited in Awa (1995: 246). According to Valbuena, while folk media can be meaningful and functional channel of communication in the context of developing societies, integrating them with mass media strengthens their communicative potential. Communication is likely to benefit from Integration of the two media as the integration brings together advantages from the wide-reaching and technologically enhanced nature of mass media and sense of belongingness and trustworthiness that come out of the cultural values given to folk media.

For instance, unlike TV and newspapers which are limited to an urban, literate population, radio especially when combined with oral drama, offers the possibility of a wider audience. A family planning project in Rwanda took advantage of that potential (Awa, 1995:247).

According to Velbuena (1991), however, such integration is not an easy task and hence must be handled cautiously. Among the considerations he suggested during integrating traditional or folk media with mass media is a careful selection of the form of folk media to be employed, true integration between folk artists and mass media producers when designing and developing the messages plus well thought advantage of the integration (Cited in Awa, 1995:246).

2.4 Synthesis

HIV communication has evolved so much since the virus was identified in the early 1980s. In every development of aspects of HIV communication, some minor or major changes in approach were registered. The approaches are categorized into two major classifications as those focusing on change in individual's behavior and those focusing on change in behavior or attitude at a macro level.

Evolution of the approaches was based on and justified with different communication theories and models as it was discussed in the preceding part. The two common views reflected in all HIV communication approaches, models and theories, which have been considered dichotomous, vary in the way they see the communication process, roles of communicators and some factors affecting the process.

Communication approaches, models and theories that aim at change in individual behavior heavily rely on individual's psychological makeup more importantly than on social factors in the process of bringing behavioral change.

Hence they reduced the role of communication to providing people with information regarding the presence or absence of conditions that facilitate or hinder change in behavior and consequences of developing risky sexual behavior. The assumption is that people can make rational choices as to whether to develop a certain behavior if they have enough information that enable them see their environment as supportive of the change to be taken up.

However, the macro-level approaches, models and theories focus on changing social norms as well as environmental and political factors as important facilitators of change in behavior. Behavior change, as has been implied in the latter school of thought, is a factor of intricate variables far beyond individual efforts to address. Therefore, communication should be assigned a role far more than informing individuals. It should play a decisive role in instigating discussion and debate so as to help communities reach on consensus as to what their problems are and how to address them.

All the revised HIV communication approaches, theories and models reasonably assigned important roles for communication. They seriously emphasized the need for communication interventions to fit into the socio-cultural dynamics of the people to be addressed. Yet, not much has been said concerning the roles and potential of folk communication in helping to tackle the epidemic. Only mainstream media have been mentioned and recited whenever communication appeared as an issue. Such a tendency of relegating folk media in favor of mainstream media is sure to have a huge repercussion on HIV interventions in traditional contexts such as in the Afar community. Thus, this paper tries to bring the role of traditional media to the fore by sighting attributes, trends and communicative potential of Dagu for HIV communication in the Afar region.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In this part of the paper, various aspects of the methodology used are presented, giving particular emphasis to describing the methods, tools and approaches of data collection as well as method of coding and analysis employed in the study.

As the title reflects, ethnography has been the leading methodology. Ethnography pays “strong emphasis on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomenon, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them” (Atkinson and Hammersley (1998), cited in Flick, 2002:147). This makes ethnography a convenient methodology to studying trends and potential of Dagu as a traditional communication tool for HIV / AIDS communication. Ethnography is taken up as it serves the need of researchers who are “interested in relationship between people and the physical, socio-political, personal, cultural and historical aspects of their life...” (Berg, 1995; cited in Sarantakos, 2005:207).

Ethnography places researchers “in the midst of whatever it is they study” (ibid). Hence it has been considered as a compulsory methodology to analyzing Dagu from the Afar point of view through a series of interviews and observation employed in the field.

Study areas were identified during the first field visit that held from 15 March to 1 April. It was by this time the researcher made arrangements to the field study and preconditions for accessing the study sites. By the end of April, the researcher began the actual field study in accordance with the research permit granted from the regional Health Bureau which is deemed to have the most interest in the study. The researcher spent 45 days living with native people in different pastoral villages and nearby towns. This helped him to closely observe the daily routines

of Afar people as they have interacted in towns and pastoral sites. Data were collected through various methods from people of various socio-demographic backgrounds: young herds, elder people, young females, clan leaders, officials living in towns, house wives and students.

All the interviews and FGDs held with rural people have been conducted through Afar language with the help of bilingual translators. This is believed to give respondents a better chance to freely express their views and thoughts. Moreover, these interviews and FGDs held in natural working places and habitats of the native people so as to enable respondents and participants speak out their hearts confidently and freely.

In the aftermath of the field study some selected informants were phoned for further information and clarifications on some issues related to the study. Afar students who have been enrolled in boarding schools and higher institutions as well as parliamentarians who reside here in the capital Addis were also contacted to make the analysis more complete and informed.

3.1 Tools and Methods of Data Generation

Qualitative methodology, particularly ethnography, has put into use for this study. "Ethnography, [as a methodology], transforms into a strategy of research which includes as many options of collecting data as can be managed and are justifiable..."(Hitzler and Honer, 1995, as cited in Flick, 2005:146).

Accordingly, participant observation, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion (FGD) were used as major tools of data generation as far as this research is concerned. For this ethnographic study, participant observation is chosen as a data collection tool since it enables the researcher to map-out details regarding overall socio-economic setup and everyday routines of the Afar

community so as to make relevant meaning out of it. In line with this, Mason (1996) cited in Deacon et al (1999) advocates for observation since “only natural and ‘real life’ settings can reveal social reality, and that it has to be experienced and shared by the researcher for research accounts to have any validity or adequacy” (1999:249). Along with observation, key informant interview and focus group discussion (FGD) were employed so as to gather thick and illuminating details which tell a lot about the Afar culture and Dagu as well as their interrelation with HIV/AIDS.

While interview is a compulsory tool to generate data out of a predominantly illiterate pastoral community such as the Afar people, the application of FGD is believed to have given informants the opportunity to contribute much to reflecting on the missing points based on ideas raised by fellow participants. Through the interactions during FGDs, a lot of lesson has been learnt concerning how social realities are formed in the Afar community.

Interview guides and a framework for observation were prepared so as to focus the data collection (Appendices I, II and IV). Both the interview guides and observation framework were prepared using various themes focusing at eliciting as much data relevant to the topic as possible. During interviews and FGDs, a number of probing questions were forwarded based on informants’ responses to questions posed using the interview guide to get a detailed account of cultural experiences.

Among the major objective of the study was to know the existing trends in Dagu use and the communicative potential of Dagu for HIV/AIDS communication in the region. Hence, a total of 86 people from the two weredas [Awash-Fentale and Dubti] participated in either an interview or FGDs [32 on FGD and 54 on interviews; please refer to appendix III for more information]. In every field

occasion, brief observation-based field notes were taken so as to augment information gathered through interviews and FGDs.

3.2 Selection of Research Area and Research Participants

Study areas were traced in March 2006 when the researcher sat foot in the field for the first time to conduct a pilot survey and to facilitate conditions for the major data collection session which was about to come. In an attempt to gain a representative picture of the region regarding trend of Dagu use, the two weredas (districts), namely: Awash-Fentale and Dubti were selected out of the overall five weredas in the region. This is done to address informants from both the Adohimara Afar group who dominantly reside south of Gewane and Asahimara Afar groups who dominantly live north of Gewane.

Key informants and FGD participants were purposively selected from both clans based on information gathered about the participant's knowledge of the Afar culture and active involvement in various affairs of the community. Moreover, as much as possible, the participant's age, sex and place of residence were taken into account in the selection process even if involvement of females was minimal due to cultural factors.

3.3 Coding and Analysis

Audio outputs of the interview and FGD were transcribed into English language and responses in the verbatim were coded in a matrix that contains various thematic categories. Then tabulated responses were thematically ranked from the most frequently mentioned to the least frequent ones.

As the social distribution of perspectives and processes of Dagu in the Afar community is one the major research questions to be treated, thematic coding which allows coding of data that reveals differing views or social worlds is taken up. Data collection was correspondingly conducted until point of saturation (a

point where no more new information appeared). Thematic categories were drawn partly from the major points raised in the research questions and partly from points frequently said by interviewees. Both data collection and coding were pursued until exhaustive list of information is coded under each thematic category.

Observation-based field notes and tabulated responses from the interview and the FGD were carefully analyzed in a way that sensible meaning emerges out of the organized data. At this point, those concepts from literature related to the issue under discussion were cited either to support arguments or to build points of criticism. Conceptually provocative and illusive extracts and texts from the field note and from verbatim of interview and FGD, which bore recurring themes, were used in the analyses. Potentially descriptive and illuminating field photos have also been used both as inputs for analyses and as materials that augment discussions and points made in the analyses.

Denzin (1984)'s triangulation system has been put into use to ensure validity of the analysis. Denzin pointed out four triangulation protocols: source triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation (cited in Stake (1995: 112-115). Source triangulation tries to see if the phenomenon remains through time, in different spaces or with people interacting differently. Study areas and informants were selected taking this issue into consideration. Then the response of each participant is triangulated with each other with the aim of 'looking for additional interpretation and more than the conformation of a single meaning' (Flick, 1992 in Stake, 1995: 115).

As to investigator triangulation, different bi-lingual interpreters with varying backgrounds have been employed to minimize interpreter's effect on the research. As it is evident in the literature review, a number of approaches, models

and theories of HIV communication have been revised to apply theory triangulation. What is more, observation, interview and FGD are employed to get rich and well informed data pertaining to methodological triangulation.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The following four widely pronounced ethical concerns where qualitative research may go wrong with approaches insensitive to them are mentioned by Deacon et al. (1999) and Best and Kahn (1993). These ethical considerations are issues of harm, informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality of the data as have been summarized as follows:

- **Anonymity:** refers to preventing sources of confidential information from being identified in any public stages such as lecture, writings or public media by disguising the real identity of sources (Deacon et al, 1999:379). Pertaining to this ethical angle, all the quotations and chunks of testimonies taken from interviewees and FGD participants have been attributed to pseudonyms with the exception of few officials working in government offices in different capacities. Real identities of these people have been disclosed as they expressed official stands of their organizations concerning the issues raised. While all the information on pseudonyms are accurately quoted, only the speaker's real identities are kept confidential so as to avoid negative consequences that may arise if the information are attributed to the real sources.
- **Confidentiality:** refers to using confidential data for the particular purpose the research initially stands for and not transferring it in anyway for a third party be it a researcher or whatever (ibid.p.380).

- **Informed Consent:** refers to making sure that research participants or the-to-be researched learned the purpose of the research and their agreements be secured through negotiation and not by any external imposition what so ever. After briefing the purpose of the research, participants were consulted if they are willing to be tape recorded and his/her photos be used for the research purpose. Only those who were willing were recorded and photographed while those who declined were not (ibid.p.375).
- **Privacy:** according to Ruebhausen and Brim (1966) in Best and Kahn (1993) is the freedom of a research participant to choosing as to how his/ her attitudes, opinions, beliefs or behaviors reflected in the data gathered are to be shared and the conditions under which they are withheld from others. Choices of participants are adhered to in the research process.

These ethical issues are carefully considered through out the course of the research so as not to compromise the confidence participants vested in the researcher.

Chapter Four

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This chapter presents the major findings of the thesis. Three overarching themes have been identified based on the research questions and the data gathered from the field. All of the themes include a number of sub themes, communication crosscutting their territory. The first theme deals with the essence of Dagu in line with cultural or social constructs relevant to it in the Afar community. The second theme stresses on various attributes of Dagu which are meant to unearth the current trend of Dagu use. And the last part hammers on communicative potential of Dagu for HIV/AIDS communication in the region. The themes are consecutively arranged in a manner that the preceding theme develops the following.

4.1 Essence of Dagu: Looking at it through Eyes of the People

For non-Afar people who are obsessed with mass media as a means of getting current or up-to-date information, Dagu may seem an ordinary conversation or chatter that goes on between two individuals or among many people who have a certain sort of acquaintance or causality with one another. For Afar folk, however, it is a communication experience that deals with burning issues: issues that seriously affect the community in one-way or another.

The definitions different members of the Afar community forward are neither alike nor distinct with some of the elements being repeatedly pointed out. Some of the definitions deal with the communicative purpose of Dagu where as others concentrate more on rituals and cultural values attached to it. Still the remaining few forward notions that equate Dagu with traditional greeting where a fairly similar phrases are used in various places of the Afar land (*Qafar Baro*) accompanied by uniform rituals.

Some of the definitions by various native informants are presented below. While all the definitions fall in one of the above categories, some of the features emphasized by one informant have been repeatedly mentioned by another. For the sake of brevity, few of the definitions forwarded by people from various socio-demographic backgrounds are presented below in a way that comprehensive insight might be grasped regarding the people's own definitions of Dagū.

4.1.1 Dagū Defined: Native's Points of Views

For Mussa Mohammed, Head of the Department of Culture with the regional office of Culture and Tourism, Dagū is:

a traditional mode of communication which is meant to address basic questions regarding situations such as availability or shortage of rain, that of peace or anything affecting the lives of the Afar people. It is a well organized traditional channel of communication where two or more people exchange current information in a much disciplined manner. Unlike in other interpersonal communication experiences, Dagū requires participant's adherence to traditional norms of communication like giving priority to a certain portion of the community such as elder folks and guests. Dagū entails quite a great deal of discipline in aspects of taking turn and being attentive listener during the communication process (*FN1, p.1).

** NB: FN, through out this text, means Field Note*

In his definition, Mussa emphasized on three major aspects of Dagū: that it is traditional, that it answers basic questions of the community members and that it is bounded with traditional rules and regulations. But, unlike others whose views are considered below, he did not have much to say on details of the process, rituals performed and manner of conversation taking place in the process.

Awel Wogris Mohammed was one of my key informants who shared me his views concerning various aspects of Dagu. Awel is one of the few educated natives who are currently serving the region. He is leading the Regional Health Bureau. Awel has the following definition to forward to Dagu.

Dagu is a major tool of communication for the Afar people. It is an "Internet of the Afar." Information is transmitted in the form of relay where an Afar must quickly share anything new to another Afar on his way to daily practice. It is as dynamic as an interesting e-mail message which someone forwards knowing that the recipient will surely forwards it to others soon. Anything that happens here [Semera] would be heard as far as Massawa or Djibouti [ports in Eritrea and Djibouti respectively] in two or three day's time. Sending false information is an absolute social taboo as far as Dagu is concerned (FN1, p.5).

Awel's version of taking Dagu for an "internet of the Afar" is a symbolic representation of its pace and reliability as means of information exchange in a cruel desert which gives less choice to inhabitants.

The value of Dagu and its essence is lucidly presented in Virginia Morell's feature article entitled "Africa's Danakil Desert: Cruellest Place on Earth". Morell depicted Dagu as:

[...] a weighty subject, something to be pondered and assessed. It is more than a bush telegraph or village gossip, more than the latest headlines. Instead, in a ceremony of handshakes and hand kisses, the Afar pass along recitations of all they have seen and heard, a poetic litany that can be almost Homeric in its detail and precision (Morell, 2005:41).

Morell's version of Dagu matches with what most Afar people defined that it is. In deed, Dagu is more than a bush telegraph whose service depends on the presence of artificial components such as battery power. It is more than transmission of untested facts like rumor and gossip. It is, rather an act of sharing a well cross-checked, attributed and trusted facts among the Afar community.

Amina Seid, an elder lady informant from *Beyahile*, on her part, states Dagu as:

a means through which we [the Afar people] remain informed concerning the where-about of our herding teams, whether animals have given birth, whether there is enough pasture and water in a place where our livestock have been reared, whether war is going on in a place, whether someone is sick or is dead. It is a process with which people have exchanged important and influential information among themselves through traditional means particularly from anyone who passes by, using the two common phrases "Iytii maha tobie?" and "Intii maha tubilie?", [which means "what have your ears heard?" and "what have your eyes witnessed?" respectively] (FN1, p.22).

While Amina restated what has already been said by others, she raised one interesting aspect of the *Qfar Dagu*, as the natives call it. The two important clauses which constitute the beginning of information exchange discourse are worth paying attention here.

Actually it is common among casual interpersonal communicators to reveal a certain sense of curiosity to learn about an unusual happening which is likely to be kept confidential or is difficult to gain instant access to. But it is not common to ask someone questions like what the Afar people ask each other. Implied in those phrases is the people's natural curiosity for information, new happenings and the corresponding motive that drives everyone to be as informed as other Afar counterparts. This is one of the features which make Dagu and the Afar

people unique as its causes are discussed in the oncoming part.

Jemal Abdulkadir is Head of the Afar Language Research and Development Center located in Semera town. Based on rich experience relevant to the local culture in which he was grown up, Jemal defines Daggu as follows:

Daggu is the process of exchanging factual information. For instance, if I and you [the researcher] departed a year before beside an oasis where our cattle drunk water, our Daggu must include all details regarding happenings and news we have come across since we set apart a year before. It is a reciprocal information exchange where both participants could be listeners and speakers turn by turn. No interruption is culturally possible while Daggu is progressing. What is possible for the listener to do is to utter an attention signal like hayee..., ihii..., ihii..., hamm..., hamm...etc. The information exchange includes every details concerning what the speaker observed, heard or saw. It may include war, death, new happenings, life requirements, disease, natural disaster etc (FN1, p.39).

Jemal's definition of Daggu includes many important aspects. From his example, one can infer that Daggu has much to do with the rural community than town people. The mode of interaction reflected in his definition is typical of rural conversation where people less sensitive to time are likely to get involved in. Moreover, the attention signals that are mentioned are absent in conversations and oral interaction that are commonly held with town men. The reciprocal role of participants in Daggu, as reflected in the above definition, implies that Daggu is an engaging and participatory medium whereby information exchange is by no means unidirectional. It reveals that Daggu is mode of communication which enjoys feedback and active participation of all parties in the process.

Amina Abdo, a young resident of Awash town, forwards another definition of Daggu that basically stresses on one of its attributes, process and purpose.

Daggu is basically a process of information exchange among the Afar people. It is a traditional face-to-face interaction where people reveal a genuine information curiosity to learn about new or unheard things particularly so as to prevent the community from possible dangers (FN1, p.39).

Interestingly enough, Amina's inclusion of information curiosity as one of the pertinent attributes of Daggu as reflected in the above definition, will be point of discussion in the next part of the analysis.

Amadu's definition of Daggu as "our telephone" is one of the commonly heard characterization of it by his fellow rural Afar folks. Amadu, an elder person living in *Duddub* kebele of the *Awash-Fentale* district contends,

Daggu is telephone of the Afar. [...] If I saw someone sick, for instance, I must share that information to others up to Werer. We, the Afar people, do not have telephone lines to say Hallo. We have, therefore, been using Daggu since time immemorial to share anything bad or good happened in our land among fellow Afar living as far as Aysaita (approximately 400 kms north of Duddub) (FN1, p. 37).

Other forceful claims such as "Daggu is life" and "Daggu is a means to maintain wealth" which are reflected in the traditional eloquent proverbs of Afar shows the value the rural Afar community bestowed on Daggu. Some of these proverbs will be touched upon in contexts where they develop the oncoming topics.

4.1.2 Dagu: Result of a Pastoral Mode of Adaptation

Pastoralists are people who basically depend on livestock and livestock products to make their living. As their lives are highly intertwined with rearing livestock, they hardly make a permanent and settled residence unlike their sedentary counterparts. Thus pastoralists lead a simple and less technologically affected life. As a result, they are often affected by instead of affecting nature (Siseraw, 1996).

Pastoralism is a wide concept which touches upon every lived reality of pastoral communities and hence trying to fully deal with it is as complex as dealing with their culture, economy, social structure and political ethos. And doing so is out of the scope and concern of this research. Thus the discussion here will be delimited to aspects of pastoralism that have a certain implication for communication, particularly for Dagu.

Among the pastoralists of Ethiopia, the Afar people reveal a certain feature of life which is typical to the community and many other notions shared by pastoralists in other parts of the country. Dagu is one of those cultural elements which are typical of the Afar ethnicity. While there is a somewhat similar oral-aural and face-to-face communication in other communities such as the *Kereyou* Oromo and *Issa* Somali ethnoses, theirs do not reveal the rigor, discipline and social value the Afar Dagu enjoys. Providing reasons for these exhibited differences may be an arduous assignment which sociologists, historians and ethnographers must grapple with. In this research, however, we will deal with some cultural dynamics of pastoralism which might have implications for Afar's necessitating Dagu.

Most Afar are pastoral people whose lives are characterized by frequent mobility with stocks in search of adequate pasture and water. The extent of mobility depends on various factors such as availability or absence of seasonal rain,

proximity of the rangelands from rival ethnic groups and the size of stocks of other Afar clans relocated to an area among others. Moreover, the nature of livestock composition at the community's disposal determines how far the herding team should travel away from the *Bura* (main settlement of the family) (Getachew, 2001; Siseraw, 1996).

In those occasions, the family is divided up into three herding groups as: the most able-bodied following after camels at very long distance; other youths and elder men following after cattle; and females and younger boys/girls rearing sheep and goats. This division coupled with a usual tendency of the people to "go to the unknown", as one of my key informants says, necessitates the need for factual and reliable information used as a base for making important decisions in regard to whether there is possibility of facing clashes with neighboring clans if one moves cattle in a certain direction; whether there is water or perilous wild animal in places planned for shifting to; and more importantly, to check if water and pasture are abundantly available in places to which relocation is planned. In here, it is not difficult to imagine how disastrous the consequences may be if decisions are made upon disinformation or misinformation (FN1, p.29). It is through Dagu that people acquire all the necessary information. In line with this, Mussa Mohammed, one of my informants, contends:

Dagu is not a question of choice for the Afar people. It is not something people take it by choice and leave it when they do not feel like using it. It is a question of survival for these people, for the people who often go to the unknown in search of pasture and water for their livestock along unfriendly desert, which could turn everything to deterioration if careful decision is not made (FN1, P.1).

However, ecology is not the only factor that shapes pastoral social structure even if much of the virtues and losses happened to pastoralist's lives as a result of ecological fluctuation (Getachew, 2001). For example, decisions to move or to stay in place are guided by communal arrangements with members of extended family or closer clan people as much as accessibility of pasture and water (FN2, p.3). Such arrangements are basic to herding requirements for cooperation and reciprocity since threats like raid attempts are reversed or tackled through cooperation. These arrangements require deliberation of reliable information, which is secured through *Dagu*, among key players of the community (FN1, p.4).

The Afar people customarily developed a communal identity where individual members of the community stand by the side of a clan member when something wrong has happened to him. This sense of communality is reflected in various aspects of the Afar life. A case in point is nonexistence of beggars from the Afar ethnic group. Not a single Afar comes to sight begging while I had stayed in the field in various places.

The other most important case in which this communal approach is observed is rarity of Afar men carrying food with them when they travel. The Afar are the people who travel. They travel with their stocks. They travel in search of lost cattle or camels. Some of them travel as a member of Caravan (*Arahoo, in their own terms*). In all these contexts, people do not carry food with them but water. What people are required to do is to visit any settlement (*Buraa*) located by the roadside. The guest is sure to be welcomed, *Dagu* being a compulsory offer to share to the host.

When considered in light of the preceding discussion, *Dagu* identifies itself as a pastoral mode of adaptation established by the people to make life in an arid land amidst of inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts most of which are resource based while

others are politically instigated (Getachew, 2001).

4.1.3 Dagu as Means of Ensuring Safety and Security

As it has been repeatedly stated in the preceding definitions of different native personalities, every kind of information regarding current happenings that has to do with various aspects of pastoralist's life makes its way to the Afar Dagu. Morell puts a detailed list of accounts pastoral Afar treat in their Dagu as follows:

It is through Dagu that they [the Afar people] learn of any new comers to their desert realm, of the condition of water holes and grazing lands, of missing camels and caravans. They learn of weddings and funerals, of new alliances and betrayals, of the latest battles fought, and the condition of the trail ahead. They learn about what has changed in a changeable land, and in the world at large, and from all this, they peak a course of action. Those who pay closest attention to the news, they say, may go on to survive, Inshallah – God willing (2005: 37).

While all the details Morell pointed out have been mentioned by native key informants and FGD attendants, what is of much relevance to this sub-topic is the way the Afar people employ Dagu as a means to ensure safety and security of the clan. To this end, it is interesting to notice the way the people inquire any newcomer concerning his identity, the clan he belongs to, the place he came from, the purpose of his journey etc.

According to most of my key informants and FGD participants in various rural kebeles and villages in the two weredas, such an extensive inquiry on detailed accounts of the guest's identity, journey plan and destination is meant for two important purposes: to acquire reliable information on recent accounts to which the guest is exposed and to protect the host clan and community from becoming victim of theft and bad reputation as a result of letting criminals pass through

their realm. On this point, Issie, an informant from Degadegie, has the following to say:

One important point to remember here is that life is not just a peaceful journey for Afar people. Inter- and intra-ethnic clashes as well as raids and counter raids happen in different places. As a result, everyone passing through our village (*Buraa*) is thoroughly inquired and investigated using extended Dagū. We do so since any possible damage done by a person to our clan or to any other people should be prevented. If we welcome a passenger who is a wrong-doer without detailed inquiry on his background, we would be out of context to tell who he was, where he was from, which clan he belongs etc for anyone who is following the person based on feet-marks that locate where the person headed. In such instances, either the blame would fall on our shoulders for letting wrong-doer pass freely or we might be suspected for the wrong deed. Detailed Dagū is held to avoid such risks (FN1, p.12).

As can be noted from the above testimony, Dagū is not limited to information transmission alone but is considered as a traditional means of ensuring security and integrity of the clan. It is meant to discharge collective responsibility in the community.

Awel Wutika forwards a certain example that emphasizes on such role of Dagū. For instance, if someone treks with a stolen camel, he cannot avoid being part of the Dagū. Any Afar who welcomes this person as a guest must investigate to find out the fact about the guest's mission. If he feels unsatisfied with the logic of the guest, the guest will be sent to elder men or clan elders (*Makabaan*) for further investigation. If the host carelessly or unknowingly let the guest leave without so doing, he will be liable to a punishment of up to 12 goats as compensation for those who are searching the lost camel as he failed to discharge the social

responsibility the clan bestowed on him as a member. The punishment is based on Afar's customary law (*Mada'a*) (FN1, p. 51).

Another instance where Daggu may be used as a means to ensure safety and security is when it goes on between two passengers heading to opposite directions. When two people go to different directions, they exchange information with each other. One would inform the other about all casualties on his journey so as to alert him regarding what he is likely to face on the way. In case the way is not safe for someone to go on foot, the passenger may be advised to cancel his journey. The information they have exchanged would move very fast and may reach to lots of people in a day's time (FN1, P. 50).

The role of Daggu in aspects of maintaining safety and security is also evident in one of the Afar proverbs as:

"Daguh diniih da'araah dini", which can literally be translated as:

Either you listen what is going on around and feel safe or you sleep over it and accept what may come.

4.2 Attributes and Trends of Daggu

In this part, characteristics of Daggu and trends of Daggu use come into play. Some of the important attributes of Daggu, which characterize it both as a process and a channel are brought into attention. For the purpose of illuminating the theme treated in this part, empirical data collected from the field and various concepts from a number of communication approaches, models and theories as well as from literature on pastoralism have been used. Sub sections under this core theme have been organized in a way that they develop communicative potential: the major theme that will be discussed in the last thematic section.

4.2.1 Attributes

4.2.1.1 Dagu: Wireless Network of the Afar

As it has been pointed out in the preceding section, some people like Awel described Dagu as “Internet of the Afar”. Though this claim seems ridiculous, there is an element of truth in the analogy as far as my view as a participant observer is concerned.

Afar people, particularly the dominant pastoral majority lead lifestyle characterized by communal social structure where an individual exhibits a considerable sense of communality intertwined with autonomy and self-esteem whose co-existent seem contrasting (see Siseraw, 1996). Individual’s autonomy and self-esteem are characterized by possession of ample of livestock and person’s exercising of power through public oratory which is much valued among this pastoral community (Siseraw, 1996:109).

The communality is characterized by various socio-economic involvements of the individual inline with respecting the established traditional norms and values. However, communal behaviors outweigh individual motives like competition for scarce resource, and wealth accumulation in approaches contrasting to traditional and communal stock management strategies like milk stock transfer (*Hantilla*) (FN2, p. 3).

Hantilla is the traditional process of temporarily handing over milk stocks such as camel, cattle and goats or sheep in rare occasions either as an offer in response to demands from borrowers (closer relations or sub-families) so as they can benefit from the milk and from all male offspring that will be born under their supervision or by the givers own initiative taken to overcome shortage of herding labor (Getachew, 2001:41).

This and other communal social arrangements added to isolation of the Afar people from the coercive central nations in the past might have helped the people to develop a strong social web which is considered as typical social capital as far as the Afar people are concerned (Getachew, 2001). Dagu is among these social dynamics which testify the existence of the social network.

As a culturally trusted medium, Dagu might be considered as “journalism by the people and for the people” to use the old political cliché. It is a very culturally valued means of information exchange, commonly among each other and at times with the world different from their well-defined territory.

People guided by vital need for information in such an arid land to survive in daily life, developed a unique curiosity for information not so soft for amusement but so hard for making important decisions based on it. This curiosity, characterized by the very commonly used conversational routines, “*Aytii mahaa tobie?*”/ and “*Intii mahatubilie?*”, which literally means “What have your ears heard?” and “what have your eyes observed?”, respectively shows info-curious and interdependent nature of the Afar people.

It is out of this interdependence that every Afar folk come out to be seeker and transmitter of new happenings or news to fellow community members through Dagu. For Afars, Dagu is their journalism where every Afar acts the roles of a journalist while elder men particularly play the role of an editor applying their canny skills and strategies of information seeking and testing as they have learned from rich life experiences. Such ethnic member’s tendency of strive to hunt new information, basically in response to discharging communal responsibilities and the dynamic nature of information exchange in terms of pace and reliability makes Dagu a “wireless network” readily available to pass anything factual and tested through.

4.2.1.2 Pace of Dagu as a Traditional Means of Communication

Taking its traditional nature into consideration, Dagu can be taken as a fast means of exchanging information and meanings through interpersonal contact. Its speed is characterized by the context in which it serves. Dagu is a medium meant to serve traditional people to help them make important decisions in “a changeable environment” (Morell, 2005:37). Thus it must reasonably be fast. And what makes it fast is the people’s value owed to it as a medium which practically help making informed decisions.

It is possible to take a single example pertinent to social life of traditional Afar people. If someone from any of the Afar clans fail to be present in the burial of one of his clan members, the *Mada’a* (customary law of the Afar) makes him liable to suffer a serious physical punishment from an organized youth group called *Fe’ima* (traditional association that acts as law enforcing body). The burial arrangement is not normally announced aloud. It is through Dagu that everyone is expected to take the information in time. This and other social requirements make Dagu to be a fast means of information transfer.

Many stories have been told by my sources concerning the pace of Dagu in the traditional communication process. Most expressive of all is Awel’s oral story concerning the briskly nature of Dagu. Awel tells the story:

Long ago, French people planned to establish telephone line connecting Djibouti to *Asaita* and sent envoys to the *Awsa* Sultanate. The news, however, reached the sultan before the envoys sat foot in *Awsa* as they had to travel for a few days on foot all the way from Djibouti. And before the envoys break the news of their government’s plan, people asked them about the recent developments with their plan on telephone line installation. Surprised of the people’s tendency to receive the information

in such a speedy manner, it has been told that the French abandoned their plan (FN1, p. 6).

The above anecdote characterizes Daggu as one of the fast media, at least, in the lens of Afar people. Awel is not alone with such a claim concerning pace of Daggu. As-Mohammed shares Awel's position. Arguing for the swift nature of Daggu, he brought a certain analogy based on his pastoral experience of oratory.

If you excrete while you are under the surface of water, the waste floats out before you have reached back to the surface of the water body and you can not hide your deed. Similarly, every deed in the Afar land quickly gets its way to people through Daggu before the doer realizes it.

As-Mohammed's analogy of Daggu with the pace faece floats out of a water body perfectly makes sense to many Afar folks whom I shared the analogy to. Rural people, in particular feel comfortable with the pace information is reached them through Daggu.

4.2.1.3 Social Acceptability

According to testimonies generated using interviews and FGDs, it has become clear that Daggu enjoys an enormous degree of social acceptability. Much of the acceptance arises out of the journalistic nature of Daggu: a reasonable degree of accuracy, truthfulness and social responsibility vested on information transmitting people by member of the community. While other details concerning journalistic aspects of Daggu will be treated in the sub-sections to come, the accuracy notion is treated in here.

As it has been noticed from the data collected in the field, Afar people are so serious on accuracy of information transmitted through Dagu. But the accuracy notion they have referred to, in their discussions, is one of avoiding deliberate fabrication of facts, not a degree of precision journalists strive to attain. Disseminating false or fabricated information is a mortal sin which can not be afforded by Afar people. Hence anyone who runs unchecked information is punished according to the *Mada'a*. Moreover, people put such liars into social exile and no one takes views coming from the person as genuine and truthful if s/he once commits such a mistake.

For most Afar folks, who wish self-esteem and good reputation in the eyes of their people as good brands, disseminating false information is an act which is considered insane. According to Mohammed Ahamdin, an expert in the Department of Culture with the region:

Information through Dagu is thoroughly checked and attributed to make it as genuine and trustworthy as possible. As it is passed using words of mouth, however, it is likely that there may be a certain degree of information distortion like exaggeration (FN1, p.25).

Almost all of the informants share view of Ali Yayu of Degadegie village. Ali states that “False claims defame the clan not only an individual member. So people take care of sifting the right information” (FN1, p. 41). Some of the features Dagu shares with journalism are further analyzed in the next sub-section.

4.2.1.4 Journalistic Aspects of Dagu

Dagu has some important features to share with journalism. Among those features is accuracy, urgency, timeliness, trustworthiness, bad news taking pace and stepping away from opinions.

Accuracy and trustworthiness in Dagu are secured through an information exchange process and canny approach by most Afars, particularly by elder men, who employ a rigor that good journalism reveals. One of the approaches basically used in Dagu is cross-checking of information from multiple sources. The following Afars' traditional proverb testifies this fact.

Numma sidahaawai yabienii

Truth is heard trice (three times) (FN1, p.58).

The Afar people, particularly elders, do not rush into sharing certain information before crosschecking its versions from other sources. Specially, if the information might have disastrous consequences, it would be double or triple checked. Using multiple sources of the same information is among the strategies employed to ensure credibility of news (Dagu). The fact that crosschecking is eminent in Dagu has been stated in one of the Afar proverbs.

Kok iyiiyie kok iyie numuk iyiiyie?

Who told you; who told the person who told you? (FN1, p. 51).

Information through Dagu is checked for its reliability and the people tend to pass critical information on to their fellow tribesmen right after it is checked. No time is spared to do this.

Reliance on eye-witnesses account and first hand information from sources is another consideration evident in the process of using Daggu. Common use of the inquiring clauses such as “*Ayitii mahaa tobbie?* and *Intii mahaatubilie?*”, which literally means, “What have your ears listened? What have your eyes looked for?”, by traditional people involved in Daggu testifies that information reliability is underlined in the Afar Daggu (FN1, p.43). Moreover, these two recurring quests in Afars’ Daggu imply the level of info-curiousness of the people. Another journalistic aspect of Daggu is its attention to the “‘5 Ws’ and an ‘H’”, as Mussa claims (FN, p.2).

4.2.1.5 Daggu as Promoter of Communal Values

The concept that Daggu promotes communal values has been implicitly or explicitly marked out in the preceding discussion. This specific section, however, is devoted to looking into the interrelationship between Daggu and *Malboo* (customary justice service) so as to contextualize how Daggu is used to promote communal values.

The Afar are traditional people who have almost been self-ruling community partly because of severe and inaccessible nature of the ecology and partly because of the attention they lacked from the central governments as well as “the fearsome reputation the community have had in the past” (Getachew, 2001; Siseraw, 1996). Consequently, they could maintain their original social establishments such as *malboo* and their customary law called *mada’a*. Still now, regardless of the coming into effect of a statutory law at a federal level, the people prefer their own legal and social institutions. They have developed an immense sense of belongingness to these traditional establishments.

Strengthening this view, Awel Wutika—the former parliamentarian with House of Representatives, has the following to say:

The rural society still uses the customary law called *Mada'a*. The people like it. Sometimes there is a clash between traditional law and modern law. For instance, if someone who had killed a person served his term of prison, the society would not leave him free even if doing so is illegal in light of the statutory law. They plan revenge to the person if the crisis is not addressed according to the traditional law called *Mada'a* (LN1, p.53).



Picture 1. People on Malboo: Alibete II Village of the Sabure Kebebe

This traditional law functions based on information collected from both the accuser and the accused side through Dagu. As such, the justice process is enhanced with collecting reliable information. Thus, the role Dagu plays in regard to ensuring traditional justice and enabling the system function can not be underemphasized.

Seeking for information is a social responsibility for any Afar, especially for matured men. "If a man fails to Daggu any guest, he is not considered as a man. It is shameful, not to inquire information from guests. It is shameful, too, not to welcome a guest for an obvious refreshment after Daggu when he joins ones home along his journey", Issie states (FN1, p. 56).

4.2.2 Trends of Daggu

4.2.2.1 Daggu: A Medium Biased to Men?

All of my research participants invariably agree that Daggu is more frequently used by Afar men than their female complements. "This partly shows the lower social status owed to women in our community", Awel Wutika argues. Considering various cultural hindrances challenging the Afar women, Awel's argument is not far from reality. However, it could not effectively justify the reason behind lesser participation of women in the information business: Daggu.

Daggu is something every Afar is curiously looking for; without it survival in the desert realm is questionable. In such a situation, lesser participation of females in the traditional arena of information exchange, while they could have contributed to bringing more information to the fore, seems less justifiable.

Awel's second point of argument gives a better reason. According to this informant, women are relatively lesser in rate of mobility compared to men. "What Females provide as information is what they heard; not what they saw since their mobility is restricted than men counterparts" (FN1, p.53). Thus, they are less likely to have the same access to Daggu which has much to do with facing new people and asking for information or observing new happenings. Unlike females, males particularly the younger and the

able-bodied practice repeated journeys on foot in search of lost cattle or camel, along with their stocks relocated in far away places or to towns for selling their animals. All these activities assigned to men offer them extra advantage of involvement in Dagu. This second view of my key informant has been widely shared by other discussants.

Another reason hindering females from wider participation in Dagu is uttered by female participants in different rural kebeles of the *Awash-Fenatle Wereda*. Fatuma, an old lady from *Waseero* village, boldly argues that it is because of males' suspicions and prejudices that female happened to less participate in Dagu. She contends that "our husbands" feel that "we would be easily sexually abused" if confronted by someone different from a closer family member. "Afraid of the misunderstanding that arises if we welcome a guest in our house, we refrain from hunting Dagu as men often do. However, we share information with close relations and fellow females" (FN1, pp. 52-53).

Men are paid a respected social position in Afar. They are considered as socially responsible bodies in the pastoral environment. This might, as well, have its own bearings on their dominancy in using Dagu. Asking about how the Afar people feel about a man, who does not frequent Dagu, Hagaisie, an interviewee from *Doho* says, "It is unmanly to avoid Dagu for any Afar man. He would never be considered as a responsible member of the pastoral community if he avoids Dagu" (FN1, p. 55).

The fact that Afar women do not participate in Dagu, as actively as men, does not necessarily mean they are uninformed or they do not share it from others. They get important information different from a formal Dagu in casual conversations with parents, husbands and anyone close to them (FN1, p.55).

4.2.2.2 Dagu: A Medium Promoting Rural Values

The fact that Dagu is liked by Afar people is a widely shared feedback taken due the course of this research. Every Afar folk: be it an elder or younger, a male or female, rural or town inhabitant, invariably show a considerable sense of belongingness and passion for Dagu as one of their traditional heritages. For rural Afar people, the question of Dagu is a question of survival as it has been discussed earlier since important decisions are made based on information gained through it. It is rather important to see how non-rural Afar folks, particularly those who work in offices feel about Dagu to learn how widely favored it is.

A few native government officials in different capacities have been interviewed concerning various aspects of Dagu and all of them showed positive attitude towards it while the majority confirmed that they still use it as a medium especially when their rural clan people come to visit them. Among them is Awel Wogris, who has the following to say:

I still make use of Dagu as a town person. However, I prefer Dagu out of office with relatives and guests who appear as casual visitors to making it in office. By its very nature, Dagu entails speaking out all specific details concerning your encounters in the daily routines. I see that it is unmanageable for office person like myself to share detailed information about number of AIDS patients, TB cases, number of people died etc. to receive views concerning details of happenings of the guest in return. I would like Dagu to be a bit precise and to-the-point. It is too leisurely for a busy town life (FN1, pp.5-6).

From the above text, it can be noted that Awel does not dislike Dagu even if it fails to be compatible with his office duties. Even if he could not totally

avoid use of Dagu when he is in office duty, he would try to wind it up as quickly as possible, only guiding the discourse to important selections. This concern of Awel regarding time consuming and less selective nature of Dagu is shared by most Afar people who have established in towns.

Such an approach does not enjoy appreciation from pastoral Afars who have a much more leisure time compared to town Afars. Rural people do not like to pace up Dagu. They feel that information quality could be compromised if the communicators are denied of enough time to speak all their hearts. In regard to this, Tahiro Ali, reflected the following view concerning brisk Dagu (*yardie Dagu/suksuk Dagu*, as the rural people contemptuously call it) in a FGD secession held in *Duddub* kebele.

yardiee Dagu kee defia Daguu inkii gidee hinaa

Settled Dagu and brisk Dagu do not bring similar return (FN1, p.45).

Rural people consider the Dagu held among town Afar as mad's Dagu: something unsettled and swift to understand each other's hearts. Gurret Amino, another informant from *Wasero* (a village near *Saburie* town), claims that "currently, Dagu is getting narrower and narrower in its depth as most people, particularly the young and the town men lost patience and the gut to tell a detailed account of events when making Dagu" (FN1, p.35). Due to that, Gurret adds, "we tend to understand each other's motives, plans and behaviors unlike our fathers. This is quite un-Afar" (FN1, p. 35).

Dagu enjoys better treatment and depth in rural places than in towns where other means of information exchange are available to fit well into busy urban lifestyle.

4.2.2.3 A Medium Frequented by Young Males; Mastered by Elder Men

According to empirical data generated through series of ethnographic interviews and FGDs corroborated with observation, young people taking care of livestock face the most chance of being involved with Dagu. As it has been discussed in the preceding part, Dagu is basically dictated by mobility. Male youths and younger adult men with full strength are the most mobile part of the community and hence enjoy the most access to Dagu.

However, this does not necessarily mean that they are the most effective users of Dagu according to informants. Dagu bears a real sense of rigor and originality in the hands of elder people, particularly men. Rabia, an informant from *Degadegie*, observes that “elder men have much respect to Dagu and hence employ utmost patience, rigor and time in the process. They often close Dagu with *du'aa/a* closing prayer. (For comparison, See Parker, 1971:219-287).

The elder men do not underemphasize the ritual and agreed upon pleasantries pertinent to the process. Young men, however, pay attention to Dagu and not necessarily to the way it goes on, as informants discuss.

4.2.2.4 Openness to Synergy with Other Media

In this research, I was also interested to learn if information disseminated through other media such as radio, TV or print materials make their ways to Dagu. Thus, I asked those few people whom I saw them using the radio regarding the ways they consume messages from the mass media. Their responses contrast with some Afar folks who are not attending to radio or any media different from their Dagu. This contrast, which has been analyzed below, is of much interest and relevance to this point of discussion.

I met Keloita Tahiro in *Alibete II*, his village located at some eight kms East of *Saburie*. He was tuning to a certain Arabic program with his Philips radio set. I approached him with the help of my interpreter, Issie and exchanged few views with each other. Keloita says to have used radio so rarely. Part of the reason is lack of power batteries his radio consumes. However, he sometimes tunes to Afari transmission from Ethiopian Radio and Radio Fana as well as from some Arab channels which he could not perfectly listen except for minimal comprehension skills he acquired from Islam school.

Keloita is of the opinion that information transmitted through radio in his language is interesting to tune to but could not see its relevance in affecting the Afar life. “I tune just to entertain myself and my friends when we rear animals together”, he commented (FN2, p.1).

Regarding the way he use the information he listened from radio, he said that he sometimes include some “surprising and fascinating” issues when exchanging Dagu with fellow Afars.



Picture 2. Keloita carrying a radio set: Dagu synergized

Keloita's tendency of channeling out some information he gathered from electronic media implies that Dagu is a tool which could be synergized with other media. Actually, the assumption that information transmitted in the mainstream media using local language would undoubtedly make its way in Dagu is widely shared by officers working in the regional HAPCO and APDA (Afar Pastoralist Development Agency), a local NGO working on integrated rural development.

Asked if HAPCO employed Dagu as HIV/AIDS communication tool, Mohammed Udda, Public Relation (PR) officer with the organization says that they have not uniquely approached Dagu as a tool even if they are "more than sure that the people exchange information they broadcast through radio and publish in the form of posters". Mohammed takes Dagu into analogy with a canal in which water readily flows through. "[...] what we are doing is letting pure water to pass through the canal", he argues. HIV/AIDS message his organization prepares is taken into analogy with the pure water which the rural people are assumed to readily consume. What has not yet been justified here is the fact that it is the people- not the HAPCO- which reinforces to or hinders the water from making its way through the canal (Dagu). The same view has been reflected by Wondwosen, an expert in the department of HIV and Reproductive Health with APDA based in *Logiya* town. Ismael-- director of APDA--too, believes that Dagu takes everything relevant and timely from other media like posters (FN1, p. 18).

In contrast with the above claim, Nura Mohammed, an elder pastoralist from *Dohoo* sees that he should not at all tune to radio.

Actually, I don't have a radio set. But I would never use it either even if I have had one. People are currently paying undue attention to *Khat/chat* (stimulant leave), radio and town life which erode pastoral values and identity. As a result, they are missing a potentially relevant Daggu which is one of our intimate and reliable sources of information. If I tune to radio, I am afraid that I miss some important Daggu (FN2, p.4).

Even if there are individuals like Nura who does not wish to trade Daggu for any other modern media, Daggu's unavoidable nature enables any unique information to be communicated across.

4.2.2.5 Uniformity in the Use of Daggu among *Asahi-* and *Adohi-mara*

One of the targets of this study was to unveil if Daggu use varies among the *Asahimara* (*Red Afar*) and *Adohimara* (*White Afar*) groups. Many of the educated Afar people think that such a distinction as red and white Afar is not natural but is an artificial creativity which aimed at maintaining the power with the Awsa sultanate that ruled the northern part of the region for a number of years. This notion, actually confirm Siseraw (1996)'s claim that Afar people are not as such different as has been claimed.

When we see Daggu use as our frame of reference, there is not as such any considerable distinction between the two main groups of the Afar people. Regarding this, Ahmmed Hagay, an informant in *Semera* town forwards an argument corroborating views of most of his fellow Afars.

As your men [researcher's] are using telephone to share information with their relations, we too, invariably have used Daggu for the same purpose. We [*Asahimara*] hear about casual deaths, war news, epidemic, illnesses,

marriage arrangements, funerals or call for meeting (gathering) etc through Dagu as they [*Adohimara*] have done the same with it. It is how our system has worked and continues to work in the future as well. There has never been such a distinction in Dagu use between *Adohimara* and *Asahimara* Afar except for minor discrepancies in use of dialects (FN1, p.59).

Surprisingly enough, there is some minor element in the way Dagu is exchanged between the *Dabnie* and *We'ima* sub-clans of the *Adohimara* Afar group who have lived proximate to each other in *Awash-Fentale* Wereda.

Debnie sub-clans say, “*Nagaaydintie Edeltu?*” which means, “how are you doing, old man?” unlike their *We'ima* counterparts and all Afar people I talked to around *Dubti*. For majority of the Afars, it is disrespectful to ask elder folks such a question. What is proper for them is to say “*negaynaan*”, which means “we are fine”. Doing so denies elder men from taking up the obvious expected role of a canning inquirer which is a traditional sign of maturity of old age. The latter group of people argue that it is elder men who should inquire for Dagu and hence the “how are you” approach snatches them of this traditional rights of elders to take the role of an inquirer of information. Doing so is disrespectful.

Debnie groups argue that it is someone who is coming from somewhere else who should say “how are you?” instead of the one who stayed at a place. They even criticize such practices of greeting guests as a sign of being thrifty. “If you don't greet a guest and ask him how he is, you are unwelcoming him to your home”. Dagu precedes refreshments – something to eat and drink or either (FN, pp. 41-42).

4.3 Communicative Potential of Dagu for HIV/AIDS Communication

Most ideas regarding Dagu's potential as a traditional tool of communication in the arid realm of the Afar have been discussed in the previous part. However, this section tries to put those implications into a context of HIV/AIDS communication. This would be done by means of relating Dagu with HIV communication theories. Theoretical implication of some attributes of Dagu will be stressed so as to answer one of the major questions the research posed at its onset.

4.3.1 Takes Advantage of Immediate Feedback

Dagu fulfills all the merits any face-to-face communication provides. Among the merits of such a means of communication are presence of instantaneous feedback and added-value of non-verbal cues both of which could play role in the process of constructing and sharing information and meanings. These features are available in Dagu unlike in mass media such as radio and newspaper where the audience may only grasp part of the message.

In the communication tradition of Afar, it is not allowed to intervene while Dagu progresses. Patience and attentive follow up are, rather, compulsory requirements. Even in the burning sun of May, where outdoor temperature rises up to 48 degree celcius, Dagu has been observed to have progressed between Afar man and woman as can be seen in the following picture.



Picture 3. An old man and a lady exchanging information through Dagu:Farman, Dubti Wereda

All what participants of Dagu do is to sit or stand in front of a person inquired for information. Information giver and receiver would often sit face-to-face in a way that the receiver could attend not only information but also emotion in which the story is being told. Afar people generally “are experts at observation and taking mental note of events” and details of an occurrence as well as a nice skill of reporting events vividly (Parker, 1971:232). This skill might have been reinforced by instantaneous feedback Dagu ever enjoys.

In most of the recent HIV communication theories, interpersonal communication which pays attention to face-to-face interaction between or among communicators is given credit. As such, Dagu involves emotional responses and active interaction of communicators who always make use of feedback (Refer to theories in the literature part).

4.3.2 Eliciting Discussion

Afar people use Dagu for a purpose a bit more than information transmission. As it has been discussed in the previous theme, it supports traditional justice process of the Afar, called *Mada'a* in aspects of motivating discussion and debate which are part and parcel of the process. Information which was collected through Dagu would be forwarded by an eloquent clan leader or representative (*Kedo aba*) who argues in favor of his clan man who is accused or who accuses someone else for wrongdoing. Then arguments would be forwarded from both sides until consensus is reached between the two parties as to the kind of fines or sanctions to be laid on a wrongdoer's clan. In Afar individual is considered more as a member of the clan than as an individual being. The clan, therefore, commonly shares the fine laid on its member's shoulder particularly if the case is murder related or any other serious encounter (FN2, P.3).

Motivating discussion, question, debate and argument has been mentioned as advantages face-to-face communication has over mass media (Hubley, 1993:60). As an organized kind of face-to-face communication, Dagu has also such merits over the mainstream media. Hubley adds, "when you are face-to-face with individuals or groups, it is easy to present both sides and make sure that the audience understands the issues. This is much more difficult in mass media such as radio, television and newspaper..." (ibid, p.54)

Reinforcement of argument, discussion and debate among the members of the community may be extended through Dagu to the extent that the people discuss and find out "who they are; what they want, and how they can get it" as what the communication for social change (CFSC) model requires (Figuroa et al, 2002: II). Such an intervention may enhance people's

tendency to looking themselves as agents of their own change in terms of adopting social behaviors (practices) that help curb transmission of HIV in a sustainable manner raising their self reliance. Most importantly, the community's attitude of believing in public discussion, debate and arguments to take a communal stand could be enhanced by using Daggu as a medium.

Afar people use the following proverb to show Daggu's tendency to enabling people share traditional knowledge or ideas from their fellows.

Numuktienak Daguu abanah numuktenak ogiel defianah

Inquiring information from someone makes you his contemporary (FN, pp.46-47)

4.3.3 Daggu as a Unique Traditional Brand of Afar-ness

Daggu is not a means of information exchange alone as most Afar people agree. It has a far more cultural implication for the community which feels pride in its communal culture and tradition.

According to oral testimonies generated through interviews and FGDs, traditional people witnessed their uncompromised sense of belongingness and passion to Daggu as something their cultural identity is reflected in. In most parts of the region, Daggu has been considered as a cultural heritage which is used to show sense of respect owed to elder men, guests and people who secured a socially dignified position. Clan leaders (*Makaban*), religious leaders (such as *Immams* and *Muftis*), customary law enforcers (*Eranaa aba*), traditional healers and birth attendants are among such group of individuals who enjoy respect, according to views of different informants. The implication is that it is possible to innovatively approach *Daggu* so that

innovations regarding HIV/AIDS prevention could be adopted by the community with an active involvement of the aforementioned homophilous members of the community as has been pointed out in the Diffusion of Innovation Model.

However, it does not mean that these are the only people who are paid respect to each other in the course of Daggu. If two Afar men of relatively similar age group faced by another Afar who demands Daggu, the two would bargain with each other to give each other priority for passing Daggu, as Daggu giving is a traditionally respected role that should prioritize someone respected. In the bargain, the one who feels that he must not take the priority utters the following discourse:

Yalii nek yaysie atuu yok taysie, which means:

God is best but you are better than me [You must pass the Daggu] (FN1, p.52)

In the above praising sentence, it has been reflected how an Afar spells out the degree of respect he owes to fellow Afar by putting the name of God into the comparison. Such a ritualistic deliberation of respect being reflected in participants who involve in Daggu partly implies the social position Daggu enjoys in the Afar community. A planned and thought about HIV communication intervention is more likely to benefit from this widely accepted folk media as discussed in Awa (1995).

As has been noted from the qualitative data generated from various rural and town Afars, HIV risk factors are motivated by the socio-cultural, economic and demographic factors as well as recent social changes such as traditionally rebellious stands evident in some Afar men who are increasingly attracted by sedentary or town life. According to some

informants, this latter factor is increasingly compromising traditional establishments such as *absuma* (prescriptive cross-cousin marriage arrangement widely practiced by the Afar ethnicity), cooperative livestock management and even the *Malboo*--the traditional process of ensuring justice. Dagu is not an exception as various people who are absorbed by town lives must step away if not completely abandon it. In relation to this, the ever increasing familiarity of chewing *khat (chat)* is said to have compromised both Dagu and *Malboo*. It is worth mentioning Mussa's experience concerning this phenomenon:

Yesteryear, people killed each other and *Malboo* was held by traditional leaders. However, the crisis which must have been settled soon was not addressed for few months. I heard that a thousand birr was spent for *khat (chat)* and accompanying ceremonies. While providing *khat (chat)* was unusual among Afar people, it is now becoming familiar to the extent it erodes the well-being of the community and its prestigious traditional establishments. *Chat* can also be mentioned as one of HIV risk enhancing factors as people are increasingly buy sex after getting intoxicated with this stimulant. A certain sort of cultural revival seems a must (FN1, pp.3-4).

Given that it is widely liked among the Afar community, especially among the pastoral Afar, adapting Dagu as an HIV communication tool may have a double advantage of reinforcing the revival of tradition and traditional institutions as well as helping the effort to contain the alarmingly growing trend of the epidemic. Using interpersonal channels [such as Dagu] for HIV communication means 'starting where [the] people are at ' (Hubley, 1993:60), instead of imposing forms of communication which are either unfamiliar or inaccessible for the community.

The remaining HIV risk factors are those which are rooted within the culture and demography of the Afar people. Quite most of them are related to deep-rooted cultural practices like polygamy and early marriage, wife inheritance, marriage out of ones clan, sharing of sharp material for genital cutting (*Andoyita*) and female's piercing of skin as a sign of beauty marker (*Hadaay*). Other factors such as lack of access to and knowledge of voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) as well as infibulations [sewing girl's vaginal opening to maintain purity of females until marriage] are also mentioned (FN1, p.43).

Such a traditionally established and long standing cultural practices are less likely to be addressed by top-down, mass media-oriented and expert dictated interventions which do not give enough space to traditional authorities and familiar communicative tools like *Dagu*. The cultural impediments could more likely be addressed through cultural ways using the local people as experts of their own problem and that of their environments as mentioned in the social-focused approaches, theories and models of HIV communication (See CFSC, participatory communication and advocacy). *Dagu* is in a better position to address HIV related issues in a context where majority of the population includes traditional and pre-illiterate people with a communal social ethos.

Regardless of this, HIV communication with the region remains a mass-media focused one which dominantly employs radio, posters, magazines and flyers among others. While there are attempts to use interpersonal communication channels and networks such as drama, public talks and by inviting traditional leaders to workshops on HIV and AIDS, they are somewhat restricted to towns and nearby rural sights. Quite a wider and hellacious portion of the region remains difficult to reach due to

unsuitability of the weather and remoteness of the places as well as the natural difficulty of accessing mobile pastoralists coupled with the current town-focused interventions. This implies that pastoral-focused HIV communication intervention is a necessity to reach those areas which are almost “no man’s reach”. To this effect, Dagu is a traditionally fitting media which is liked by the rural majority more than anything else.

The community’s nature of valuing oratory as a symbol of power, as stated by Siseraw (1996:109), and the engaging and inclusive nature of Dagu, implies the presumably potential role of Dagu as a tool for HIV communication dealing with prevention, care and support as well as minimizing stigma and discrimination. Being cheap and locally available, Dagu is believed to involve the community as self-reliant actors in the HIV/AIDS interventions.

Almost all HIV/AIDS communication approaches, theories and models, not least the individual-oriented BCC, acknowledge the importance of interpersonal communication approaches and social networks as it has been implied in the review part of this thesis. With the recently dominating HIV/AIDS communication interventions which target culture, social norms and policy environments, the role of a socially well-established folk communication system such as Dagu could not be under emphasized.

4.4 Rethinking HIV Communication in the Afar Region: A Case Study

The preceding three sections of the analysis chapter have dealt with the essence, trends and communicative potentials of *Dagu*, particularly for HIV/AIDS communication in the region. To this end, current concepts of HIV/ AIDS communication have been used to justify the communicative potentials of *Dagu*. The findings give the impression that *Dagu* can be innovatively approached as one of the culturally appropriate, contextualized and readily available mode of communication which is familiar to the various socio-cultural contexts of the Afar community.

This sub-section, however, tries to argue on the need for adopting *Dagu* from a different angle. Thus, some points where the existing dominantly top-down and expert dictated Behavior Change communication is likely to fail will be discussed. To this end, an HIV/AIDS education poster prepared by Afar Pastoralist Development Agency (APDA), a magazine published by the regional HAPCO and some reactions of native audiences on the weekly 30 minutes radio message on HIV from Ethiopian Radio Afar Language-Addis Ababa have been critically approached. While the selected pieces are too few to show the whole picture of HIV communication in the region, they have been purposely selected in a way that they show some major deviations from what is expected in a normal HIV/AIDS communication intervention.

4.4.1 Reflecting on an HIV Communication Poster

Poster has been one of the tools used for HIV awareness creation in the Afar region. Quite a number of posters bearing Afar customs and traditions in terms of wearing styles and material properties as well as cultural symbols such as sword (*gillie*—a knife Afar men over 15 years of age held in their waist) are made available in various public places.

All the posters the researcher observed have used captions in two languages: Afar and Amharic. The former uses Latin letters while the latter uses Ge'ez alphabets. In some cases bylines are spelt out in English alphabets.

The good side of these posters, as presented below, is that they reflect the people's own cultural and traditional values. They are drawn in a way that they grab people's attention thereby inviting viewers to discuss on concepts and messages implied or reflected in them. The very presence of pictorial clues is more likely to help people make the required meanings out of the posters. However, it is difficult to think that everyone can make the same meaning out of a single poster as different people use different background knowledge to unlock meanings out of a given visual material. This may go to the extent that opposite meanings may be derived out of the same poster.

What is more, the captions and verbal illustrations written in the two languages are less likely to be understood by pastoralists who are hardly literate. This implies that the posters are prepared to fit in to various realities of the town minority than the rural majority who could neither write nor read.

The other drawback of the HIV messages in general and posters in particular is that they depict HIV/AIDS as a death sentence. The following poster can be taken as a case in point. The poster tries to depict how a man left for a bar to have sex with a commercial sex worker contracted HIV and gradually collapsed to death. While the A2 sized poster presents the person's unfortunate encounter in five different phases in a way that the negative consequence of HIV risk behavior be clearly understood, it depicts HIV as a death sentence than as a disease which can be prevented and cautiously handled. This way of labeling AIDS an extraordinarily special disease ends

up in stigmatizing patients and discouraging the essence of positive living thereby hindering prevention and care efforts from the part of the community.



Picture 4: an HIV Education poster prepared by APDA- a Local NGO

The above poster has another implication as well. The first scene bears un-friendly conversation between the husband who has already begun leaving for town and his wife who remains home with her baby boy. The wife asks him where he was going. The husband responds, "None of your business!". This partly shows the lower status of women in the Afar community. While we can see the lady's concern to her husband from the very question "*Anke gexxaah?*/ where are you going?", the husband's discouraging response shows the patriarchal orientation of the community which is evident in the everyday lived reality of the community.

The same poster leads us to the man's dealings with the commercial sex worker who welcomes him in a very seductive manner. Then we see the person distressed and quarreled with his own conscience. Then we see the same man suffering from AIDS and finally died of it. Actually, this poster is meant to teach the disastrous consequence of risky sexual activities. And it served this purpose as some informants believe. However, the poster could not help people who did the same with bar ladies with their frustration against Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT). Moreover, it adds to the fearsome reputation of AIDS as a merciless killer as has been reflected in the title of a quarterly bilingual magazine (*Saxxekal*) prepared by the Regional HAPCO.

4.4.2 The Case of *Saxxekal* Magazine

Saxxekal is another print publication meant to raise awareness on HIV / AIDS related issues. It has been prepared by the regional HAPCO. *Saxxekal* is a magazine prepared in two languages: Amharic and Afar as can be observed in the following scanned cover page of the magazine's publication in August 2004. Views of various people who live with HIV/ AIDS and that of celebrities among the native people are commonly entertained. Moreover,

common people are not denied of the chance to take part in the magazine as far as they have something to contribute to the various columns devoted to HIV/AIDS matters according to Mohammed Udda, Public relation officer with Afar HAPCO and chief of the editorial board. The term *Saxxekal* is literally translated as “saving generation from being destroyed”.



Picture 5: *Saxxekal* – A Quarterly Bilingual Magazine Dealing with HIV/AIDS Issues in the Region

The very name of this magazine implies AIDS as something which destroys generation. HIV/AIDS has been sensationalized. AIDS, in particular, has been given a status which is unparalleled in its tendency to destroy generation. This may have a negative implication in aspects of fighting stigma and reducing undue frustration. This seems to contradict with the argument that AIDS must be considered as other diseases like malaria and TB and hence patients must be handled carefully but in a positive and non-discriminating manner.

4.4.3 On HIV/AIDS Communication through Radio in the Afar

Language

Radio has been considered as one of the major HIV/AIDS communication tools in the Afar region. Thus, Afar HAPCO has bought a weekly 30 minutes air time from Ethiopian Radio. Care Awash (a regional branch of Care—International NGO), too, buys airtime from radio Fana Afar Language program to broadcast HIV-focused dramas and edutainment. While both Afar HAPCO and Care Awash transmit HIV related issues from the capital Addis through Afar language, whether most people are tuning is not an easy question to answer. Some natives who reside in Awash town say that it is not convenient for them tuning to the radio broadcasts since the transmission time is not an ideal one for them to do so. Regarding this, Ardahisu, an informant in Awash town argue that it is difficult to tune to radio at about 4:00 or 5:00 PM as they are working ours for many people. Ashenafi, too, shares this assertion.

Moreover, most Afar people living in rural pastoral sites do not have radio sets. For few exceptional people who have one, buying batteries is considered as a luxury for youths such as Agiro of the *Doho* kebele. After all, tuning to radio messages is not such a burning issue for pastoral Afar who

dominantly relies on *Dagu* as a major means of exchanging information.

Overall, the HIV/AIDS communication intervention in the Afar region has not been duly contextualized to the various socio-cultural customs of the community. Rather the communication approaches which are practiced in the central highlands of the country which is inhabited by sedentary populations have been adopted. This shows that the region has done little in designing particular Health communication strategy which fits to the various socio-cultural variables of the region unlike what is stated in the national Health communication strategy (MOH, October 2004).

Given the aforementioned limitations of this top-down HIV related messages, one can reasonably argue for rethinking the HIV/AIDS communication interventions in the region.

Chapter Five

Conclusion and Implications

This study has tried to ethnographically explore the essence, traditions of Dagu use (trends) and communicative potential of Dagu- Afars' folk medium- as a traditional communication tool for HIV communication intervention in the region. To this end, cultural, economical and social practices and establishments that have implications, in one or another way, to Dagu have been carefully examined taking the native's point of view. Daily routines of the Afar folks ranging from proverbs and greetings to gatherings for customary practices such as *Malboo*, which is meant to ensure justice in their territory, have been attended, observed and recorded so as to analyze their implications to and connections with Dagu.

Quite a lot of people ranging from young and old pastoralists to culturally experienced town people working in various offices in the region have been either interviewed or invited as discussants in FGDs held in the people's natural environments. Socio-cultural and demographic factors were considered in selecting participants of the study as equally important as knowledge of and experience in the Afar culture and traditions. Finally, the following conclusions have been made based on findings of the study.

5.1 Conclusion

Dagu is considered by the people both as a process and a result, as they say "*ma Dagu?*" which means "any news?" considering it as a product (news). On the other hand when they say, "I am on Dagu", people are referring to it as a process of information dissemination. The findings of the research showed that Dagu is among the most valued cultural heritages of Afar people invariably, even if trends of its use vary due to various factors such as

traditional gender-based and ecologically -driven task differentiation between females and males or between strong youths and retired elders, among others.

Accordingly, women and children under 15 are found to have least involved in Dagu though information may reach them through informal occasions during leisure time and in social occasions. While the able-bodied and the highly mobile youths employ Dagu the most so as to fit into information requirement of pastoral life, which is characterized by raiding and warring, elder men are known to have made the most out of Dagu. Elder Afar men are valued as canny information exploiters in Dagu and hence are often prioritized in circumstances where they are accompanied by young people when Dagu is exchanged. Thus engaging elder men as communicators of messages regarding HIV/AIDS seems likely to bring positive returns.

Where as Dagu is valued in almost every part of the study area, Afar community members residing in towns either make less use of it or try to adapt it into a context of busier urban life. The growing rate of cultural deterioration which is often reinforced by the young rural Afars' attraction to sedentary life has contributed to less use of "the proper Dagu".

Regarding trends in Dagu use between the two major Afar groups, no considerable variation has been observed. The usual curiosity for information which is traditionally appropriate and reinforcing continues to exist in both groups, particularly in pastoral communities. The discourse, pleasantries, the sense of respect and the need to provide guests with refreshing food and drink accompanying with Dagu remains uniform in the observed sights.

Dagu, both as a face-to-face communication channel and as a traditionally valued medium is believed to be a significant tool for HIV communication in the Afar region where about 90 percent of the people are rural inhabitants who have less access to mainstream media. The fact that information gathering through Dagu is considered a social responsibility bestowed on a member of a clan reinforces clan men to consider Dagu as an uncompromised duty. Moreover, Dagu's tendency to channel out relevant messages acquired through radio or any other media and its requirement for journalistic rigor and careful scrutiny of information make it a reliable means of communication where fabrication is unthinkable.

Given that it is a major means of communication for rural people, that it can be a foundation for dialogue, discussion, debate or question, Dagu can be nicely adapted to any HIV/AIDS communication approach, model or theory so as to plan an intervention which could involve the people as agents of their own change. Its flexibility, all inclusiveness and familiarity makes Dagu a relatively cheap tool of HIV communication whereby more socially valued community members could become communicators after receiving short term training on HIV/AIDS and its communication arena.

The mainstream communication tools such as posters, magazines and radio, on the other hand, are less contextualized to the various socio-economic dynamics of the community as has been discussed in the case study. This implies the need to rethink health communication in general and HIV communication that are currently functioning in the region in particular.

5.2 Implications

Even if the research has not set out to explore the current HIV/AIDS communication initiatives in the Afar region, some major organizations actively working on the area have been contacted. The feedback taken from the interviews held with these organizations is that, most of them rely on mass media, particularly radio and printed materials such as posters for communicating HIV/AIDS in the region.

Ironically enough, most of the rural people either do not have radio sets, they may be preliterate, or they may not like tuning to as one of my informant has argued. In such a context where the people have their own liked traditional medium like Dagu and other traditional institutions such as *Malboo*, using radio and poster as a major means of communicating HIV seems like installing the wrong software.

However, a well thought of HIV communication strategy which emphasizes on bringing change in behavior should start from what the target community have it already. Dagu is among the most valuable and valued cultural heritage for these dominantly communal pastoral community. Thus, Dagu can be innovatively approached, may be adapting it into edutainment context from its hard news kind nature.

Moreover, the current mass media focused, centrally prepared top-down messages could hardly address the root cause of the epidemic. While clear signs of gender inequality, wife inheritance, polygamy and lack of informed VCT service and illiteracy collaborate to the increasing prevalence rate of the epidemic, it using mass media which hardly involve the wider rural community seems superficial. The community better be mobilized to make

use of important cultural establishments and traditional power holders in attempts to curb the epidemic. It is still noon to pursue such an attempt.

Lastly, the gradually increasing rural HIV prevalence trend implicates that an urgent and genuine cooperation between government, donors, civil societies and not least the academia is an immediate necessity before the HIV declares a complete escape out of hand. To this end, it seems reasonable to look into ways in which Dagu can be successfully implemented for HIV/AIDS communication.

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Appendix-I

Interview Guide

A. Essence of Daggu

1. How do you describe daggu in relation to the various socio-cultural aspects of the Afar people?
2. What specific agenda do you discuss through daggu?
3. How does daggu progress among your clan people?

B. Traditions of Daggu Use

1. How often do you make daggu?
2. Who do you often make it with?
3. Why is that so?
4. How interested are you in exchanging information through daggu? Why?
5. How do your clan people react to you if you ignore them when they wish to make daggu with you?

C. Demographics of Daggu

1. Who among the Afar people do you think values daggu the most as a means of sharing information?
2. Do females and children under 15 make daggu with whoever they feel like among their clan people?
3. Are there any special occasions or circumstances where someone is denied of being involved in daggu?
4. Do you think curiosity for daggu differs among different parts of the Afar people?
5. Is there any variation among the different Afar clans you know regarding style of using daggu?

D. Efficacy of Daggu as a Communication Tool

1. How trustworthy do you think information from daggu is?
2. What are the factors contributing to trustworthiness of information shared through daggu?
3. How fast is information through daggu in reaching the target audience?

E. Rituals of Daggu

1. What procedures/rituals does daggu incorporate?
2. How do others react while someone in their group is involved in daggu?
3. Would you please tell me any specific example or story that shows the position of daggu in your culture?
4. How is daggu presented in the Afar proverbs? Any example you remember?

F. Knowledge of HIV and AIDS

1. Have you heard of HIV/AIDS so far?
2. Who have you heard about it from, for the first time?
3. What specific aspects of it have you heard?

G. HIV in the Afar Daggu

1. Have you heard of any HIV related information through daggu?
2. How informed do you think are your Afar neighbors about HIV/AIDS?
3. Do you discuss issues relating to AIDS and sexuality with your family members?
4. When/ In which circumstances?

H. HIV/AIDS and the Community

1. Which specific aspects of the Afar culture do you think aggravates transmission of HIV/AIDS?
2. Have you ever heard of anyone among the community members died from AIDS?
3. What was your reaction when you had learned about his/her death?
4. From where do you receive most information concerning HIV/AIDS?

H. Social Order among the People

1. Whose orders and words among your clan people/ family members do you pay much respect?
2. Why?
3. What kind of people, do you think, receives the least respect among your community members?
4. Why?

Appendix-II

Interview Guide (For Health &Development workers)

1. Does your organization have any HIV/AIDS communication strategy?
2. What specific aspect of HIV/AIDS intervention your organization actively engages in currently?
3. How do you address the rural community?
4. How do you evaluate/assess the success of your HIV/AIDS communication programs?
5. What similarities or differences does the HIV/AIDS communication in your region have compared to that of other regions?

Appendix-III

A Summary of Profile of FGD Discussants and Interviewees

1. FGD Discussants

Group A:

- Discussion held in *Ayrolafie* and *Gebelaitu* kebele (*Key Afer*), *Dubti* wereda.
- A total of 8 people: 2 elder females and 6 men (2 of them young pastoralists aged below 30).
- Two of the participants (1 man and 1 woman) reside in the camp.
- FGD held in Afar: local language with the help of interpreter.

Group B:

- Discussion held in *Dubti* town.
- A group of 8 people: an adult female, 3 youths and 4 elder men involved in the discussion.
- One of the participants does not have much exposure to pastoral life.

Group C:

- A group of one elder lady, 5 elder men and a young man held the discussion in *Dohoo* kebele.
- One of the adult males was *Makaban* (clan leader).

Group D:

- A group of 8 men, 3 of them youths participated on a discussion.
- One of them was a *fe'imat aba* (leader of youth group serving as traditional peace keepers).

2. Interviewees

Awash-Fentale Wereda:

- 10 ladies (all married) interviewed.
- 24 men, 5 of them youths, are interviewed.
- 1 young female and 5 men were from towns.

Dubti Wereda:

- 5 females, one of them young involved in interviews.
- 15 men, 7 youths, participated in interviews.
- 7 of them were public officials in different organizations.

Appendix-IV

Observation Framework

Some of the Points to ponder:

- Cultural entities implicating to Dagu
- Traditional performance in Dagu
- Inclusions and exclusions in Dagu
- Assessment of thematic focus of Dagu
- Instances of HIV/ AIDS risk behaviors
- Implications of daily pastoral routines to HIV risk behaviors
- Attention into cultural elements motivating HIV risk
- Interrelation of traditional institutions with Dagu
- Different places different approach to Dagu use?

Appendix-V

Location of the study area

