

The Peace Corps tackles HIV, malaria and poverty in Ghana by using Turning Technologies' Audience Response Systems

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About Ghana and The Peace Corps:

Ghana has serious problems with disease and poverty – nearly 30% of the population live below the poverty line, more than 400,000 people are infected with HIV and 3,000 people die every year from malaria. However, the government and NGOs are tackling the country's health issues and are making significant progress. The Peace Corps has worked in Ghana for more than 50 years and is currently engaged in Ghana Behaviour Change Support (BCS), a four-year project managed by Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health in Baltimore, USA. The programme uses TV and radio shows to target urban populations and rural outreach in villages, communities and camps that do not have access to electricity, clinics or structured education. David Fields, Development Agent for Peace Corps Ghana, discusses how Turning Technologies' Audience Response Systems (ARS) are making education more effective by giving Ghanaians the confidence to speak more freely on sensitive issues, and also helping to compile data to improve strategies and ensure key health messages get through to people most in need.

The Issues:

Before ARS technology was introduced, the Peace Corps programme faced many problems, the largest being that locals find most health subjects difficult to discuss openly.

David Fields comments, "Mothers don't want to talk about the number of children they have lost, if they are able to feed their families, if they use birth control methods, if they have been tested for HIV or if they have HIV. Rural farmers don't want to disclose how much money they make, if they are in debt and if their family regularly sleeps under a mosquito net. Women and children are particularly inhibited. Women will not speak up when their husbands are around and children will not speak up when their parents are around. Before ARS, we would have to conduct these interventions in private one-on-one sessions or within individual houses. Another major problem occurred during group meetings, where we would concentrate on one particular group – for example farmers – and the rest of the audience would feel left out."

The Implementation:

The Peace Corps began using Turning Technologies' ARS on a national and local level in Ghana. The technology forms a key part of The Good Life Game Show, a trivia-based TV show now in its fourth season. Each episode has a different health topic, and the response systems are used for audience participation, contestant tie breakers and prize giveaways.

In the rural outreach programmes, the technology enables the Peace Corps to educate large groups and gather anonymous data from people most at risk. In an interactive health lecture series to high schools in the central region of Ghana, presenters focused on education about malaria, HIV, nutrition and water sanitation. Individual presentations were created on each topic and presented once a week to each school using the TurningPoint polling software. The programme only required two personnel to complete the project and reached over 450 school children weekly.

The response systems were also taken to five community clinics for baby weighing days to discuss nutrition with new mothers. This programme was conducted in local languages by clinic nurses using the handheld ResponseCard AnyWhere receiver that collects data remotely without the need for a computer or projector. Mothers were surveyed about their diets, what they feed their children, what vegetables they farm and when they stopped breast feeding. The results gathered were shared with a fellow development group who increased their nutrition budget by \$90,000 to conduct a nutrition intervention in the district.

An economic surveying programme targeting rural cocoa farmers also used the ARS. Fields explains, "The suicide rate of farmers has nearly tripled in the last 10 years. It is believed that the cause is stress of losing their family land to lenders they are unable to pay back. The programme surveyed cocoa farmers associations on the amount of debt their farmers are currently in, and this helps to alert us to those most at risk."

Fields adds, "Without Turning Technologies I would never have been able to reach thousands of people here with literacy problems. Locals' ability to write and fill out forms is rarely 100% here. The beauty of the ResponseCards is that they are so simple to use. Everyone here knows how to use a phone. The face of the ResponseCard is very similar to a phone keypad."

The Results:

David Fields continues, "The implementation of the ARS has two important impacts. First, it gives people the liberty of responding to questions openly, because the process is anonymous. Before ARS, if we asked a community, 'Is there a problem with rape and forced sex in Ghana?' The men would be the only ones to answer. They would say there is no problem, and that would be the end of the conversation. With the ARS, you ask the same question about forced sex, and a substantial proportion will answer yes. When that percentage goes up on the screen and the whole community sees it, then a real conversation about the problem can take place. The conversations go on for hours. Not only does this make our programmes more effective, but it makes statistical reporting of the problems much more powerful."

"Secondly, ARS allows us to gather more accurate information on the current status of the communities' knowledge. The most exciting application is the capability of data splicing. At the beginning of the presentation, we ask basic questions about gender, age group and occupation. Then I can merge the data from every presentation that I've done in my district into one report. The computer will tell me which demographic needs more education and more information. I had originally got this technology to make presentations more interesting, but now it is helping me to decide who I should be talking to and what messages need more attention."

A particular benefit of the technology has been its reliability in remote areas. "TurningPoint is great for a classroom. I have used it in rural clinics deep in the Kakum rainforest, and I have held programmes with hundreds of people at night by candle light in communities that don't have electricity. I don't think a more successful programme could be designed for these conditions. Power failures and projector problems made life harder, but TurningPoint used with the ResponseCard AnyWhere receiver always allowed us to at least complete the presentations no matter what the climate threw at us. All of the ResponseCards have held up well. We have not had a single one broken or lost. However, we did have one stolen by a very intelligent monkey!"

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