

## Firelight Newsflash! 23 October 2007

### Writing for Change

<http://www.fahamu.org/WFCEng/sitemap.html>

Do you find writing a chore? Do you spend hours looking at a blank sheet of paper, wondering how to start?

Then Writing for change can help.

Researchers, campaigners, scientists, fundraisers, project managers, social activists and people who train writers will benefit from the unique combination of three sets of writing skills. The CDROM and website covers core skills, writing for publication and writing for advocacy. Writing for change is full of practical examples and exercises that you can apply to your own working experience. Writing for change contains examples from the field of international development and practical exercises that can be used by people who train writers. A resource centre contains training materials and links to related websites. Site maps and a printed users' guide make it easy to follow.

For more information, email [cds@fahamu.org](mailto:cds@fahamu.org).

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### Why HIV/AIDS education?

<http://www.avert.org/aidseducation.htm>

Each year there are more and more new HIV infections, which shows that people either aren't learning the message about the dangers of HIV, or are unable or unwilling to act on it. Many people are dangerously ignorant about the virus, with surveys around the world showing alarmingly low levels of awareness and understanding about HIV amongst many groups. Education can help to overcome such ignorance, and thereby prevent HIV infections from occurring.

Education needs to be an ongoing process, because each generation of young people need to be informed about how they can protect themselves from HIV as they grow up. Older generations, who have already hopefully received some AIDS education, may need the message reinforced, so that they continue to take precautions against HIV infection, and are able to inform younger people of the dangers.

There are three main reasons for AIDS education:

#### To prevent new infections from taking place

This can be seen as consisting of two processes: firstly, giving people information about HIV and AIDS, such as how they are transmitted and how people can protect themselves from infection. Secondly, people must be taught

how to put this information to use and act on it practically - how to get and use condoms, how to suggest and practice safer sex, how to prevent infection in a medical environment or when injecting drugs.

### To improve quality of life for HIV positive people

Too often, AIDS education is seen as being something which should be targeted only at people who are not infected with HIV in order to prevent them from becoming infected. When AIDS education with HIV positive people is considered at all it is frequently seen only in terms of preventing new infections by teaching HIV+ people about the importance of not passing on the virus. An important and commonly-neglected aspect of [AIDS education with HIV positive people](#) is enabling and empowering them to improve their quality of life. HIV positive people have varying educational needs, but among them are the need to be able to access medical services and drug provision and the need to be able to find appropriate emotional and practical support and help

### To reduce stigma and discrimination

In many countries there is a great deal of fear and stigmatisation of people who are HIV positive. This fear is too often accompanied by ignorance, resentment and ultimately, anger. Sometimes the results of prejudice and fear can be extreme, with HIV positive people being burned to death in India, and many families being forced to leave their homes across the United States when neighbours discover a family-member's positive status. Discrimination against positive people can help the AIDS epidemic to spread, because if people are fearful of being tested for HIV, then they are more likely to pass the infection to someone else without knowing.

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## **ELDIS Resource Guides**

<http://www.eldis.org/go/topics>

ELDIS aims to share the best in development policy, practice and research. On their website, you may browse more than 22,000 summarised documents from over 4,500 development organisations - all available free to download.

Resource Guides provide easy structured access to our extensive collection of research and policy documents. All are editorially selected, summarised and available free to download in full text. Resource guides are intended to help you keep up to date with the latest in development research, policy and practice.

Topics include: children & young people, education, food security, HIV and AIDS, and participation. Each guide offers:

- a searchable library of documents

- our featured selection of important or topical new research

- selected browsable collections of documents on key themes

- key websites of organisations working in each topic

- an email Reporter bulletin: listing latest additions to Eldis

- key issues: quick introductions to emerging areas of research and policy

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## **Chairing a Meeting**

Why do meetings fail? Well, there may be reasons such as lack of time, a badly designed agenda or an unsatisfactory venue. However, if the chairperson is doing his (or her) job well, it should be possible to overcome these difficulties.

Chairing a meeting means ensuring that a meeting achieves its aims. The meeting should have been called for a specific purpose and all discussion at the meeting must be steered to this end. This may sound simple in theory but in practice it is a very demanding task. The skills required include:

**1) Impartiality:** A chairperson is like a judge in a court. S/he should ensure that all participants have an opportunity to express their point of view. It can be difficult to leave your own opinions at home, but it is crucial to remain impartial.

**2) Assertiveness:** Ensuring that everyone gets a hearing will almost certainly involve stopping someone from dominating the proceedings. The more contentious the issue the more likely you are to require firmness. You don't need to be rude or dogmatic. Phrases such as "I think we should hear from Ms. X on this" or "Can we have some comments from the administrative department on this" should be sufficient in most cases. Once you provide this opening, however, you need to ensure that there are no interruptions while the next speaker has their say.

**3) Staying on course:** How often have you seen an agenda left totally aside? The meeting starts off well but becomes consumed by a particular topic (perhaps the first item on the agenda) and ends when time runs out. A Chairperson must assess the importance of each item on the agenda, and allot time to each topic as required. If one issue begins to dominate the chairperson must take control. You might suggest a further meeting to discuss the issue at a later date, or that the main parties concerned could continue the discussion at the end of the meeting. Sometimes it will be necessary to call for a decision and then move on to the next topic. You need to stay alert and make sure that the issue has been given an adequate and impartial hearing within the allotted time.

**4) Summarizing:** Summarizing can be used to end a topic, to end a discussion, to limit the need for discussion and at the end of a meeting to ensure that everyone has a clear overview of what took place or what action is now required. It is an invaluable skill for a chairperson. Summarizing requires active listening. You have to state concisely what was said in an impartial way and end with a clear statement about what is expected to happen next. It takes practice to summarize well, but it is a skill well worth developing.

## **Conclusion**

Many people feel that being a chairperson means opening the meeting and stopping rows or disagreements. There is much more to it than that. Prior to the meeting, a chairperson should consult with the secretary regarding the agenda, ensure that all interested parties have been notified, assess the level of interest and the potential for divisiveness for each item, and allot time to each item, based on decisions required and number of people attending.

During the meeting, the chairperson must focus on the decisions required of the meeting, ensure that all participants are accorded adequate time, decide when to end debate on each topic, use appropriate questions to gather information or re-direct discussion, listen carefully to all contributions, and clearly summarize proceedings with an emphasis on decisions taken and future plans.

The above are all key ingredients for a fruitful meeting. A tactful but assertive chairperson will facilitate an effective meeting, and that's what everyone wants.