

Adapting Materials for Audiences with Lower Literacy Skills

Social and behavior change communication (SBCC) programs may find that it is more appropriate and cost effective to adapt existing communication materials than to develop new ones. SBCC practitioners who want to meet the needs of lower literacy audiences will find the adaptation process particularly relevant. Rather than beginning from scratch, materials developed for literate audiences with similar characteristics, such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and lifestyle, can be adapted for use with lower literacy audiences, a group often ignored by health and development programs. This *C-Bulletin* describes the adaptation process.

What Is Adaptation and Why Adapt Materials?

Material adaptation is the process of modifying existing communication products for a new or different audience. This involves more than just translating them into the local language or modifying the artwork.

Adapting a material is similar in many ways to developing the original resource, though somewhat abbreviated. The process still requires active collaboration with stakeholders, a clear understanding of the intended audience, extensive testing of concepts as well as material drafts, and careful oversight throughout. To do this, SBCC practitioners should conduct a concept test with members of the intended audience to verify that the ideas behind the materials or activities and their formats are appropriate.

Material adaptation can save time and money if changes needed are not extensive. For example, the technical content may require a few changes, and the adaptation may be able to take advantage of creative concepts and formats proved successful elsewhere. There may still be a need, however, to adjust the material or product for a different culture or context, including messages, visuals, and language.

What Does the Adaptation Process Involve?

Adapting SBCC materials or activities includes the following:

1. Engaging with partners and stakeholders
2. Reviewing the national communication strategy
3. Conducting an inventory of existing materials
4. Finding out whether permission is needed to use or adapt materials
5. Considering the costs involved in adaptation
6. Developing a creative brief
7. Concept testing, pretesting, and consulting with stakeholders
8. Revising and finalizing
9. Producing and disseminating
10. Monitoring and evaluating

SEPTEMBER 2012



PEPFAR



TIP: Follow the same 10-step process when adapting existing curricula or toolkits.

TIP: Questions to answer when considering adaptation of a material:

- Are the materials and products developed for another cultural context or country with at least similar social and behavior change determinants? If not, do not adapt.
 - Do the concepts and messages help meet program objectives?
 - Do they address barriers to behavior change or help to facilitate behavior change for the intended audience?
 - Are appropriate and culturally specific values and beliefs represented in the content and visuals?
-

1. ENGAGING WITH PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Collaborating with partners avoids duplication of effort and helps to ensure that adapted materials are effectively disseminated and used. Obtaining buy-in from local governments and other stakeholders is also important so that everyone works toward the same goal.

2. REVIEWING THE NATIONAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Adapted SBCC materials and activities do not stand alone; they are tied to ongoing programs. SBCC practitioners engaged in adapting a material or activity should refer back to the national communication strategy and its section on audience and context analysis. From it, they can derive valuable information about intended audiences, including audience characteristics, norms, and factors that affect their behaviors—those that serve as barriers to change and those that facilitate the adoption of a new behavior or social norm.

The communication strategy or the audience and context analysis should also provide background information on the communication needs of each audience, including:

- their preferred communication sources, formats, and visuals
- their literacy levels and their written and/or spoken language or languages
- the kind of information they currently receive and its relevance to them
- real or perceived barriers to the desired social or behavior change
- benefits the audience perceives might flow from the desired change
- prevailing socio-cultural norms and how these are perceived or manifested in legislation or policies

3. CONDUCTING AN INVENTORY OF SBCC MATERIALS

The next step is to inventory existing SBCC materials and activities as well as those under development by partners. This includes: SBCC materials, pretest results, and program evaluations. Resources are often available from partners and organizations. Many can be accessed online, including through partner websites and C-Hub, an online SBCC repository (see www.c-hubonline.org).

Once SBCC materials and products of this kind are identified, their adaptation potential needs to be analyzed. The criteria to apply include whether the material or product is relevant (addresses barriers to change); accurate (technically correct); compelling (motivating and engaging); and well designed for the new audience (uses appropriate images and is at the right literacy level). If a material or product has these qualities, it can be adapted or possibly even used as is. If it does not, a new material or product will be required that better meets the needs of intended audiences.

During this analysis of materials and products, there is a need to think about each as a potential candidate for adaptation in relation to three components:

1. Words (written and spoken): texts, narratives, captions
2. Visuals: Photographs, cartoons, drawings, images, graphics
3. Formats: Style, size, and type of material or sequence of events

Each of these components is addressed below. The pointers aim to assist decision making on adaptation and help identify specific areas that need to be modified.

1. Words, written and spoken

- Review texts, narratives, and captions for accuracy, amount of information, and presentation of concepts, including whether these are presented in logical order.
- Determine whether wording is used appropriately and addresses behavioral and socio-cultural barriers to change for the intended audience.
- Examine culture-specific statements and local idioms used in the texts, narratives, and captions; consider whether they are in the preferred language of the audience and at appropriate reading levels.
- Determine whether texts complement or compete with visuals used.
- Find out if the messages and the sources of the messages (for example, narrators) are relevant, credible, and attractive to the audience.

2. Visuals

- Decide whether the visuals used illustrate important points, are understood, and will not confuse the audience.
- Determine whether the people and places seen in the visuals represent the audience and their culture realistically and will be familiar and acceptable to them.

3. Formats

- Decide whether the print, audio, or audio-visual formats are likely to be effective in reaching the audience. For example, do audience members readily follow comic formats that use thought bubbles?
- Determine whether the design of the material is inviting, visually appealing, and easy to follow, including fonts, typefaces, and colors used.
- Decide whether the size and format of printed materials are appropriate and convenient for their intended use (often field tests are required to determine this).

4. FINDING OUT WHETHER PERMISSION IS NEEDED TO USE OR ADAPT MATERIALS

While a number of SBCC materials can be freely adapted in different settings, there is a need to verify whether copyright requirements have been imposed by the organizations that produced them or by the creative agencies they hired.

It is never a mistake to contact the organizations identified on the material or product and ask for permission to adapt it. However, if it was produced with USAID funding, the contents are usually public property and copyrights cannot be imposed, even if the creator was an advertising agency. Therefore, if the material is in the public domain, copyright authority is not needed.

TIP: *If there is no adequate communication strategy, consider developing an implementation guide to operationalize the existing communication strategy. Start with an inventory and review of existing materials and conduct a series of audience consultations (see C-Change VMMC Adaptation Guide, <http://www.c-hubonline.org/resources/voluntary-medical-male-circumcision-vmmc-communication-toolkit-kenya-english>).*

TIP: *Find out if there is a SBCC or relevant technical working group for the development of an SBCC materials. Technical working groups often share materials and expertise. They are also useful fora for identifying partners with whom to collaborate during and after the adaptation process.*

TIP: *If the decision has been made to translate written material, it is important to hire professional translators who:*

- *are able to write well in their native language*
 - *have the necessary cultural knowledge*
 - *can translate for meaning (instead of a literal translation, i.e., word for word)*
 - *are experienced in writing for lower literacy audiences*
-

TIP: *Keep in mind that translated text often takes up more space than text in English. If extra space is not accounted for, the translated version can look crowded, with font too small, and visually unattractive.*

For all adaptations, it is common practice to acknowledge intellectual property, i.e., the efforts of those who created the original material or product. This is done by including a full citation with the original title and the name of the producer.

5. CONSIDERING THE COSTS IN ADAPTATION

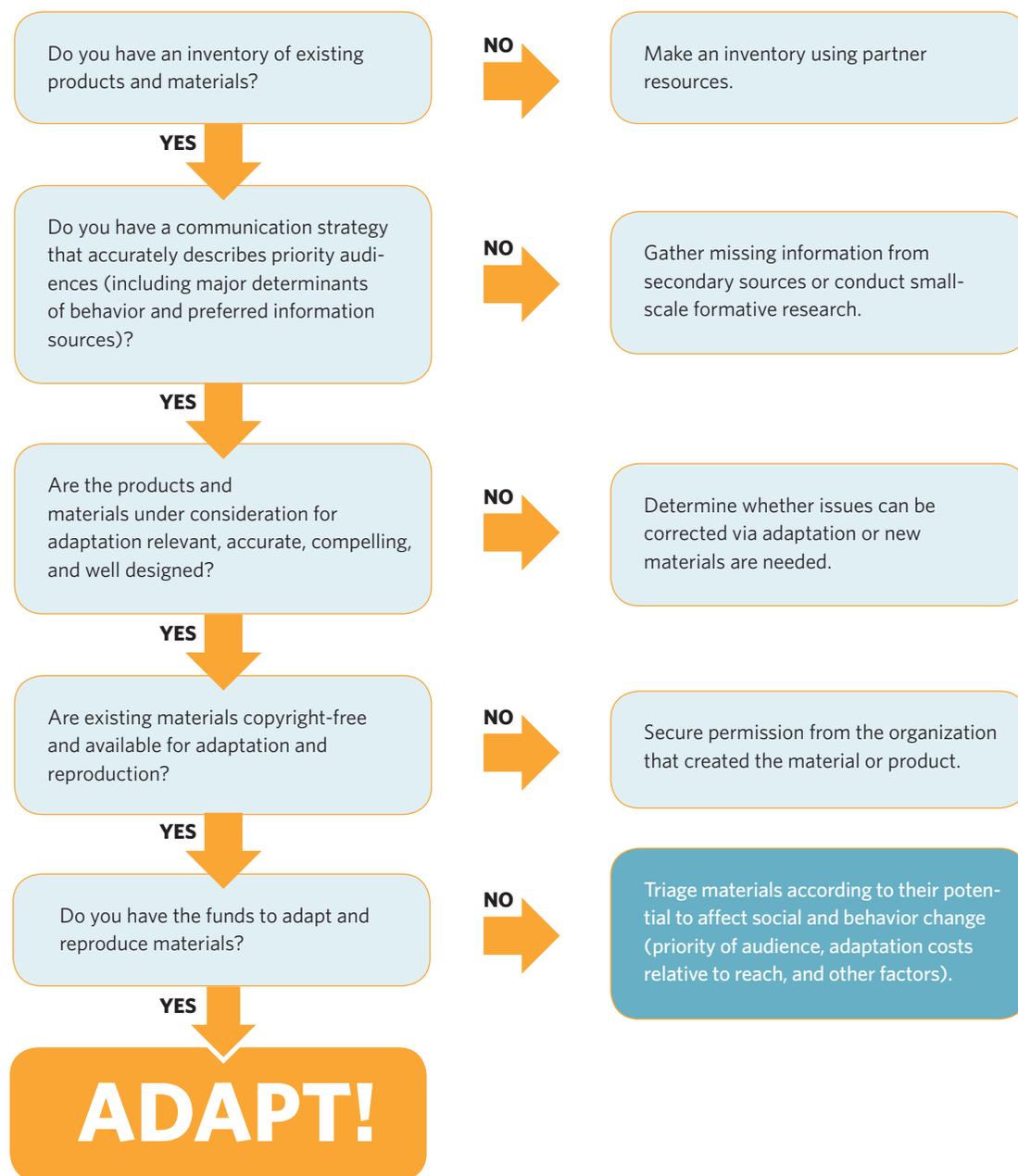
The next step is to assess whether sufficient time, staffing, and financial resources are available to adapt the material or product and achieve the communication objectives. The cost and time involved in revisions can vary substantially—from country to country and even within countries. Text revisions are not likely to be as expensive or time-consuming as revisions of formats or of images or illustrations. Revisions of audiovisual productions are particularly costly and will require more audience testing.

Budget line items to think about when adapting a material are listed in the table that follows and further explained in *C-Bulletins 7* and *8*.

Adaptation Step	Key Costs to Consider
Concept testing and pretesting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payments to skilled facilitator, note-taker, and mobilizer who invites participants • Copies of drafts of written or audiovisual material • Rental of venue where material is tested • Incentives and transportation for participants and the teams conducting the concept test and pretest • Staff time for analyzing findings and writing up reports
Design and revision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract with a full-service agency or payments of fees or salaries for writers, artists, actors, models, audiovisual producers, and/or designers (varies based on the type of channel to be used, material format, and extent of the changes) • Translator fees • Copywriting and editing of texts and narratives and production and editing of audiovisual material
Production and distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of printing or producing the number of copies in the quality required • Cost of transporting copies and cost of travel to distribution locations

To summarize steps 1–5, the decision to adapt existing materials or to start over with a new SBCC material or product depends on detailed knowledge about the intended audience and their context, a systematic assessment of existing SBCC materials and products, and a full understanding of the adaptation process and its cost (see [Adaptation Flowchart](#)).

ADAPTATION FLOWCHART



6. DEVELOPING A CREATIVE BRIEF

For each material to be adapted, a creative brief needs to be developed—a two- or three-page tool that guides the adaptation and explains the design concept and content. It may be worth noting that a creative brief for an adaptation does not differ from one that guides the development of a new SBCC material or product. The process for developing this brief contributes to strategic thinking about the intended audience, desired changes, barriers to change, and how to address these barriers. Once completed, consultations are held with an in-house creative team or a contracted agency to ensure that everything stated in the creative brief is clearly understood.

At this point, the creative team or the full-service agency should be able to begin to compose the concepts that will be tested. They may even be able to draft a few adapted versions of a material or product, if the original is from a similar culture and meets many of the needs of the intended audience. More information on identifying and working with agencies, creative teams, printing and other vendors, and distributing SBCC materials and products can be found in *C-Bulletin 7* and more about creative briefs can be found in *C-Bulletin 3*.

7. CONCEPT TESTING, PRETESTING, AND CONSULTING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The next step is essential when developing new and adapted SBCC materials and products. Concept testing and pretesting them with members of the intended audience will help ascertain whether the information, illustrations, wording, and formats under consideration are seen as relevant, comprehensible, and appealing. To obtain unbiased results, the same audience members should not be involved in a concept test and a pretest. During this step, any confusing or unclear terms will be identified and alternative formats may be suggested. In short, concept testing and pretesting will reveal whether the material or product is effective in supporting the desired change in knowledge, attitudes, and social norms.

If a contracted agency or creative professionals—artists, graphic designers, audio or video producers, actors, and musicians—are needed for the adaptation, they may benefit from observing the concept or pretesting sessions and from experiencing the audience feedback first hand. While this is often inspiring and makes their jobs easier, ensure that creative professionals play only an observation role and do not influence the testing.

If the material or product to be adapted seems to need only slight modification, it may be possible to skip concept testing and begin by pretesting the first formatted draft. Otherwise, the first formatted draft of a material or product is designed after concept testing. This draft is then pretested to finalize its format, content, and design, including its wording and use of visuals.

More information on testing (methods and sample questions) and stakeholder reviews can be found in *C-Bulletins 8* and *9*.

8. REVISING AND FINALIZING THE ADAPTED MATERIAL OR ACTIVITY

Feedback from both the concept test and pretest is used when revising and finalizing the adapted material or product. It is worthwhile at this point to revisit the relevant communication strategy to ensure that audience feedback is harmonized with national strategic guidance and with stakeholder feedback.

Final revisions should be left to the creative team or full-service agency under the lead of a qualified technical staff member. The agency or creative team can now advise the program on creating and strengthening linkages between activities and materials, turning them into a recognizable campaign with logos and slogans. While designing and revising, they need to keep the focus on writing effective text and on choosing formats and visual content that suit lower literacy audiences. More information on text, formats, and visuals for these audiences is in *C-Bulletins 2, 5, and 6*.

Partners and other stakeholders should also be involved throughout the process to ensure their buy-in and that the adapted material or product continues to be disseminated and used. Ministry of Health approval is usually required before finalizing and printing materials used by national programs.

9. PRODUCING AND DISSEMINATING THE ADAPTED MATERIAL OR ACTIVITY

Unless a full-service agency is taking care of this step, an affordable but high-quality print or duplication company needs to be identified and requested to estimate what it will charge for making the required number of print, audio, or video copies of the adapted material. It is often a good idea to get estimates from more than one company.

The number of copies to be produced needs to be calculated and a distribution plan devised, along with a system that tracks distribution. At a minimum, the plan should detail distribution points, how many copies of the material or product will be sent to each, and who will be responsible for distribution. Implementing partners and community mobilizers can be trained on how to disseminate and use the material.

10. MONITORING AND EVALUATING THE ADAPTED MATERIAL OR ACTIVITY

The final step is evaluating the reach, use, and effectiveness of the adapted material or product. In addition to tracking geographic reach, an assessment must be made of whether the distribution system is working well and the adaptation is cost effective. Factoring into this calculation is the overall cost of designing and producing the material or product.

Quantitative methods are often used to measure geographic coverage and how many people have been exposed to the material or product. It is also important to monitor and evaluate whether the adapted material or product is achieving its objectives and has helped to motivate change.

To assess this properly, a qualitative component should be added: key informant interviews and/or field-testing (or observation) that gauges the use and effectiveness of the material or product, for example, if the material or product aims to encourage dialogue around a certain health topic and whether peer educators and community leaders can be observed using it in community meetings and other settings. Even with limited resources, it is possible to get this kind of input from community partners. This information may lead to the development of additional materials or expanded activities that address newly identified needs.

Challenges to Overcome When Adapting SBCC Materials

Challenge	Solution
Faulty and ineffective content may be carried over into a new region or program.	Before deciding to adapt a material or activity, get feedback on its effectiveness from the program that produced it and review evaluation data.
Insufficient time and money are allocated because the choice to adapt was driven by the need to spend as little as possible.	Create an initial budget and timeline based on the cost of creating a new material or activity...then eliminate extraneous items.
Existing content and messages have undue influence.	Always start by analyzing the audience's needs and listening to their perspective on what content will work for them.

LEARNING FROM GOOD EXAMPLES

Learning from others is a good way to understand the benefits and challenges of adapting SBCC materials and what kind of content needs to be modified. Two examples of successful adaptations follow.

Adaptation of an Explanation of Birth Control Pill Side Effects

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) revised its explanation of side effects of birth control pills to suit lower literacy audiences. The revision is more easily understood because FDA used a larger font size, shorter sentences, and less complex words.

SIDE EFFECTS OF ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES

Vaginal bleeding

Irregular vaginal bleeding or spotting may occur when you are taking the pills. Irregular bleeding may vary from slight staining between menstrual periods to breakthrough bleeding which is a flow much like a regular period. Irregular bleeding occurs most often during the first few months of oral contraceptive use, but may also occur after you have been taking the pill for some time. Such bleeding may be temporary and usually does not indicate any serious problems.

Original (6 pt. type)

Bleeding side effects

You may have some spotting or light bleeding between periods, especially after you miss any pills.

Revision (10 pt. type)

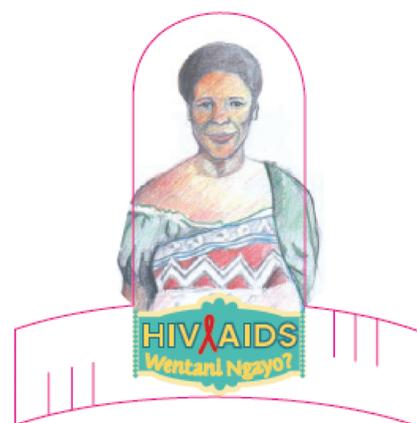
*Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc. 2005. Health Literacy Fact Sheets.
http://www.chcs.org/publications3960/publications_show.htm?doc_id=291711*

Adaptation of South African Community Conversation Toolkit to Other Countries

C-Change developed a toolkit of interactive HIV prevention materials in South Africa, using a participatory method with intended audiences called Action Media (see Bulletin 4). Later, the project adapted the toolkit for Swaziland and Zambia. During concept testing, audiences and stakeholders perceived the artwork as not “Swazi” or “Zambian” enough, so it was revised (see below). In Swaziland, C-Change added components that addressed additional HIV drivers, with input from stakeholders and local partners.



Original version from South Africa



Adapted version for Zambia



Adapted version for Swaziland

C-Change. 2011. *Community Conversation Toolkit for HIV Prevention*. Washington DC: FHI 360/C-Change. <http://www.c-hubonline.org/8005/>.

What Is the Value Added of Adapting Materials?

- A set of SBCC materials that have been adapted appropriately and effectively for the audience's local context and specific needs
- Potential savings in time and cost to develop materials
- Stakeholder buy-in and community support for the SBCC materials

Have Adaptation Procedures Met these Standards?

- Engaged with partners and stakeholders
- Conducted an audience and context analysis to understand the situation
- Identified and assessed available SBCC materials and products
- Found out whether permission is needed to use or adapt the material or product
- Considered the costs involved in adaptation
- Developed a creative brief
- Conducted a concept test, then pretested a formatted draft and revisions with members of the intended audience
- Made revisions based on the concept test and pretest
- Finalized and disseminated the material or product in line with a systematic plan
- Monitored and evaluated the adapted material or product

CommunicationBulletins

- 0 INTRODUCTION
- 1 UNDERSTANDING LITERACY, HOW ADULTS LEARN, AND WHAT THIS MEANS FOR SBCC PRACTITIONERS
- 2 SBCC MATERIAL AND ACTIVITY FORMATS FOR AUDIENCES WITH LOWER LITERACY SKILLS
- 3 DEVELOPING A CREATIVE BRIEF
- 4 USING PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES TO DEVELOP SBCC MATERIALS
- 5 WRITING TEXT TO REACH AUDIENCES WITH LOWER LITERACY SKILLS
- 6 VISUAL AND WEB DESIGN FOR AUDIENCES WITH LOWER LITERACY SKILLS
- 7 WORKING WITH A CREATIVE TEAM
- 8 TESTING SBCC MATERIALS
- 9 CONDUCTING A STAKEHOLDER REVIEW
- 10 ADAPTING MATERIALS FOR AUDIENCES WITH LOWER LITERACY SKILLS**

Resources for More Information

AMC Cancer Research Center. 1994. *Beyond the Brochure: Alternative Approaches to Effective Health Communication*. Denver: AMC Cancer Research Center and CDC.

C-Change. 2012. *C-Modules: A Learning Package for Social and Behavior Change Communication*. Version 3. Washington, DC: FHI 360/C-Change.

C-Change. 2012. *Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision Material Adaptation Guide* Washington, DC: FHI360/C-Change.

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. 2010. *TOOLKIT for Making Written Material Clear and Effective. SECTION 5: Detailed Guidelines for Translation*. 9–34. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Haaland A. 1984. *Pretesting Communication Materials*. Rangoon: UNICEF.

Haaland A., O. Akogu, and O. Oladepo. 2000. *Reporting with Pictures: A Concept Paper for Researchers and Health Policy Decision Makers*. Geneva: UNDP/World Bank/WHO.

Quiroga, R., et al. 2002. *Developing Materials on HIV/AIDS/STIs for Low-Literate Audiences*. Washington, DC: PATH/Family Health International.

Acknowledgments

The C-Bulletins were developed and written by Sarah Meyanathan, Antje Becker-Benton, and Linda Sanei.

Feel free to make copies.
We welcome the sharing
of resources.



This bulletin is part of C-Change's Communication Bulletins, or C-Bulletins for short, that aim to assist social and behavior change communication (SBCC) practitioners engaged in developing and adapting materials and activities for audiences with lower literacy skills.

This publication is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) under Cooperative Agreement No. GPO-A-00-07-0004-00. It was produced by C-Change, a project managed by FHI 360 to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of SBCC as an integral part of development efforts in health, environment, civil society, and other sectors.

Recommended citation: C-Change (Communication for Change). 2012. *C-Bulletins: Developing and Adapting Materials for Audiences with Lower Literacy Skills*. Washington, DC: FHI 360/C-Change.