

# “Peut-on-en-Parler?”

## A hiv/aids campaign for illiterates in Mali

After studying visual illiteracy and the problems surrounding HIV/aids in Mali, I decided to set up a project around pair-education targeting young men especially. In this case, pair-educateurs are local boys who set up discussion groups with other boys to talk about HIV/aids. The project was named Peut-on-en-parler (can we talk?). The material I developed is made for three purposes:

1. To attract attention and spread the word about the existence of ‘peut-on-en-parler’, the pair-education project > *banner*
2. To develop visual aids that can be used by the pair-educateurs in starting up the discussion and addressing the issues > *20 discussion cards*
3. To give away items that will serve as a reminder of the discussion groups and possibly spread the word. > *calendars, postcards*

### Testing

If you are reading the above with some attention, you will notice that most of the campaign items are the tradition means to reach literates. By studying the culture closely, I found ways of using these means in a different way, so they can be used for illiterates. The project is being tested at the moment and a version 2.0 (and maybe even 10.0) is definitely needed to address the problems that we find. Because faults in understanding are potentially dangerous, this testing and retesting is vital to the success of the project. When looking at the following material, please understand it is a work in progress. Hopefully, I will be able to publish test results soon.

### Production issues

Some material can be produced in Mali, others will have to come from abroad. The discussion cards are made so they can be printed in black/white or color on a common desktop printer. For longevity, they can be laminated.

Calendars are printed in Bamako, the capital. Paper supply is not steady, which means that sometimes it is easier and cheaper to print in Europe. It would be better for the economy and environment if the orders remained in Mali.

The banner can be made in neighboring countries, at least, such was the case in 2005. This may change for better or worse because of technical advances in Mali itself or unrest in neighboring countries.

### Image 1 - Banner 100x400cm

A doctor in Segou pointed out to me that banners are often used in the main road of a town to introduce an event. However, they were never around for long. When he made a banner for his HIV/aids testing center, he noticed it got taken almost immediately. On a visit in town the next year, he noticed a piece of the banner was being used as a duvet cover on a bed. He explained to me that textile is expensive in Mali, and to have a blanket out of one piece is a sign of wealth. This is amazing, because where else would you want an HIV/aids message than on a bed?

For the start of a local peut-on-en-parler project we decided to design a banner as well, in the hope it would eventually be taken and made into bed covers. But what to put on this banner if

This project is preceded by research on visual illiteracy and Malian Culture. You can find the report “The problems surrounding hiv/aids in Mali” and the article “Visual illiteracy in non-western countries” as a pdf at [www.annemiltenburg.com](http://www.annemiltenburg.com)



50% of the people passing cannot read the text? We decided to make two layers: one for those who can read the text, perhaps recognize a logo and the famous ribbon. The second layer is a visual spectacle: we wanted to draw as much attention to this unusual sight of photography instead of lettering, to get people talking and asking questions. The picture introduces a family on the right, and one of the sons who does not want to listen. When the banner is hanging between the trees above the street, you notice four large ribbons. When the banner is taken down and put on the bed, one notices the ribbons are made up of hundreds of small pictures taken from the material in the discussion group.

#### *Image 2 - Calendar 70x100cm*

One of the few printed things you find in Mali are calendars. They are always in one format, a printer probably supplies the basic layout and the client can add their own or prefab image as a background. The calendars are based on the french Christian name-days. Whether people can read or not, these calendars are treasured items in any household. There are very little other alternatives for wall decoration. The peut-on-en-parler calendar introduces a new layout and has one of the proverbs from the discussion cards on it. This way, the message from the discussion group will be around for years, in a prominent place.

#### *Image 3 - Postcard A5*

If you cannot read or write, how do you stay in touch with your relatives in other towns? People hire writers and readers to get their message out, or to hear what someone has to tell them. Because paper (and news) are scarce, these letters are treasured items. I have witnessed an entire town pass a letter from hand, just to feel it and to look at the strange handwriting. Therefore, distributing free postcards as paper to use for your correspondence is a way to get your message across to remote areas.

#### *Image 4 - Instruction card A4 (front)*

When you sit down with a group of people to discuss sex, it can be quite uncomfortable, especially in a culture where such things are a bit of a taboo. The discussion cards visualize local sayings/proverbs that are an informal way of addressing these taboo. For instance, card number one says: The beard says during the day, what the pagne (dress) told him in the night. This saying pokes fun at the so-called authority of the man over the woman. It is often true that a woman has an influence on her husband, but does not show it in public but only in the intimacy of their own home. The pair-educateur will discuss the items on the card, people can guess which proverb is. Is the proverb true? Can a woman influence a man? Can a woman talk to a man about things and influence his opinion, for instance on the use of condoms?

*Image 5 - Instruction card A4 (back)*

The front of the card is for holding up to the discussion groups. The back is for the pair-educateur who can often read, with questions he can raise. He can also see which card is next.

*Image 6 - When a bird flies for the first time, it makes a tour of the country*

When someone is a virgin now, it does not mean they will be a virgin for ever.

*Image 7 - If I have to die in the bush, it better be the lion that kills me*

It is better to die in a quick, honourable way, than to suffer a slow unfair sickbed.

*Image 8 - Just because you live at the bus station, doesn't mean you have to entertain a lot of strangers*

Immigrant workers and people on the road are the gateway of HIV/aids into Mali

*Image 9 - Keep you fence closed so the wild animals cannot get in*

A bit obvious, guard yourself against things that are not good for you.

*Image 10 - The use of razors*

Ceremonial shaving of the head before going to mosque with a shared razor is not safe.

*Image 11 - Breast milk or powder milk?*

On the one hand, the chances of a child getting HIV/aids from his mother because of breast feeding is 8%. On the other, a child only has a 52% chance of survival when not getting breast milk but powdered milk. In the 70's western companies propagated the use of powdered milk, which caused an extreme backlash of children's deaths.

*Image 12 - Mutated mosquitos & colonial times*

It is important to address local fables on the disease, otherwise the entire effort fails. People will listen politely, but after an hour ask you why a condom is necessary when misquotes can get you all the time.

*Image 13 - Truck drivers and prostitutes*

Truck drivers are visited by prostitutes as they rest by the side of the road. This makes them the gateway of HIV/aids into Mali

*Image 14 - Immigrant/emigrant workers*

A rich man (you can tell by the suit made of one fabric, the gold chain and the leather shoes) comes back to Mali with his travel chest and bag. Has he seen other women when he was away in countries where the prevalence might be higher? Is that his right? Is it a fact? And what can you do about it?

*Image 15 - Water versus toilet paper*

HIV/aids is still thought of as a western disease. In Mali, people don't use toilet paper but water in a kettle to wash themselves after using the bathroom. Europeans are thought to catch the disease more easily because of this compared to Africans.



**2006**

Mieux vaut ne pas donner que donner à contre mesure

1/1/06





**Clos ton champ avant que les troupes y pénètrent**

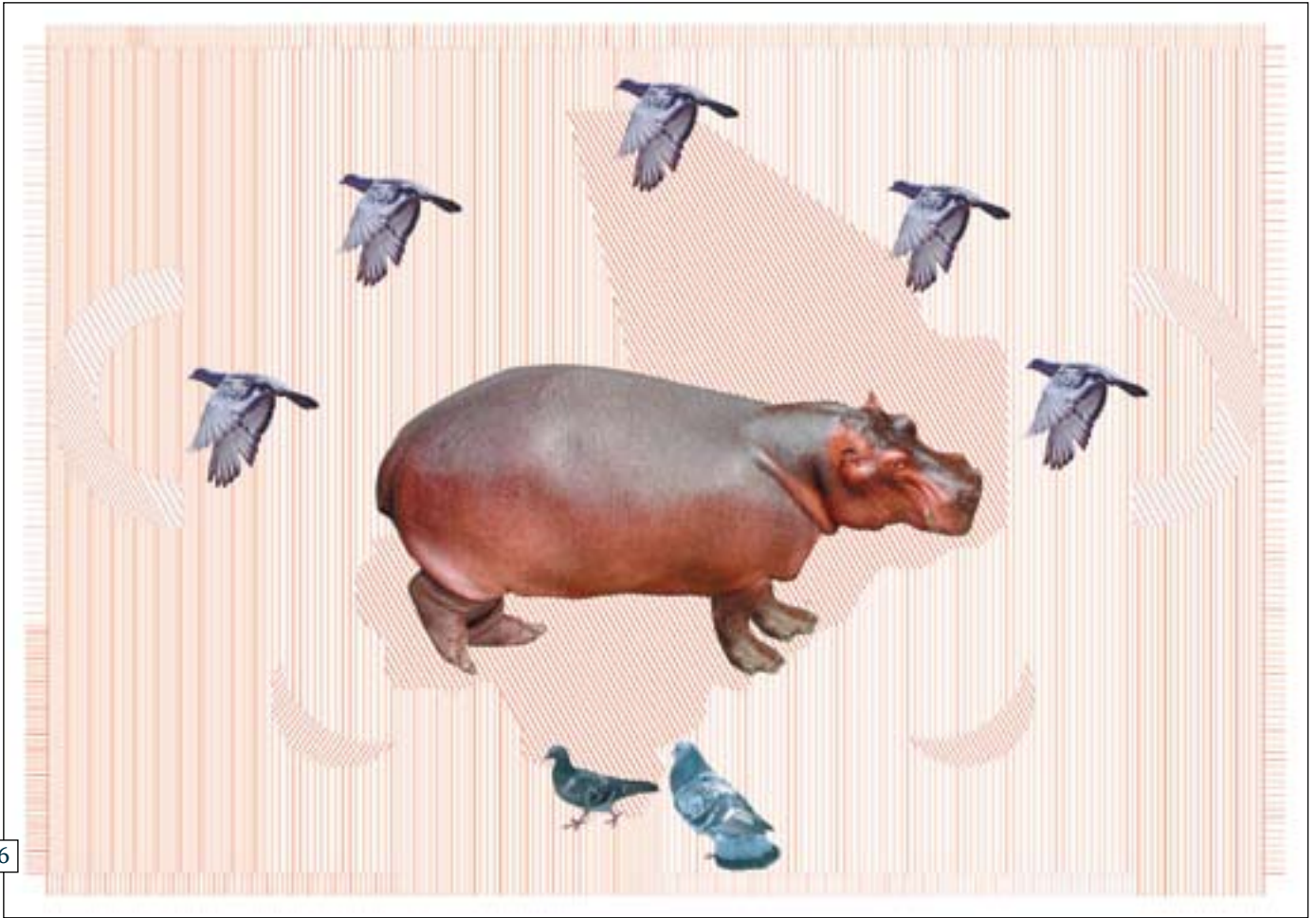
Est-ce que vous savez comment on se peut protéger contre le VIH/SIDA?  
Demandez conseil à votre dépistage ou à votre éducateur local

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#### Literature

Andreas Fuglesang, "Applied communication in development countries, Ideas and observations"

Published by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, 1973

(out of print)