

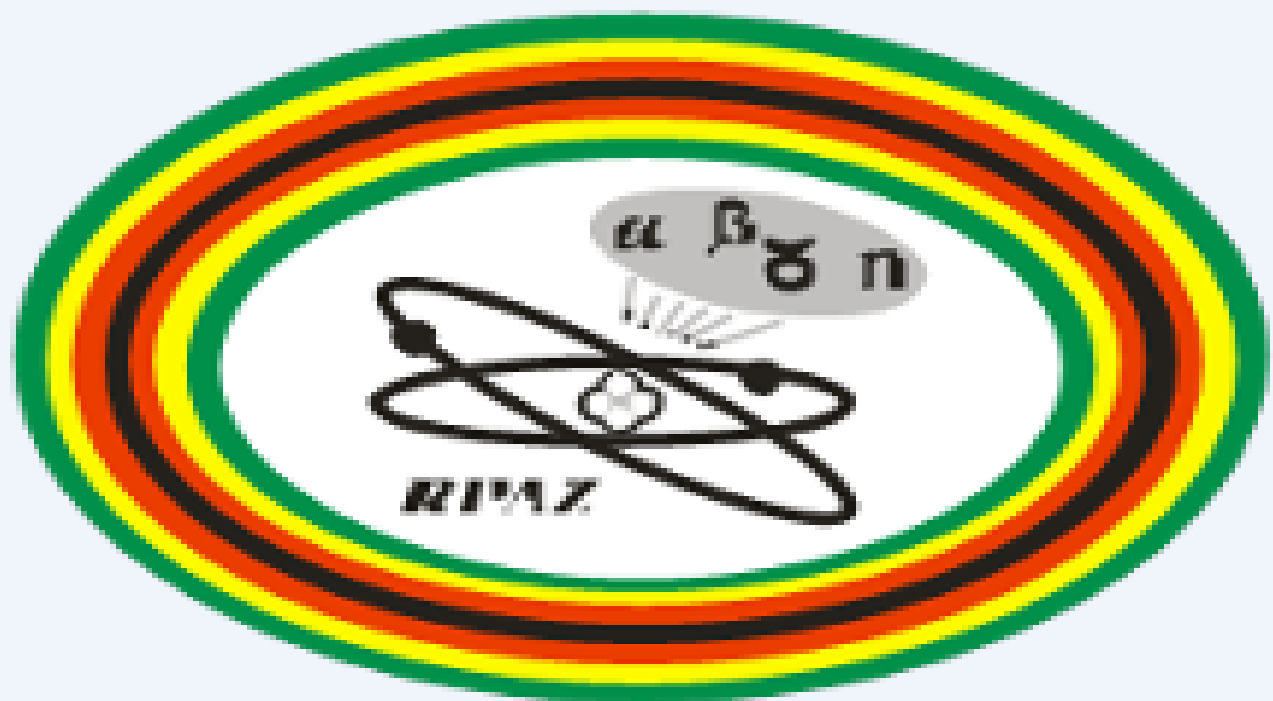
IAEA

Challenges of Communicating Nuclear/ Radiation

Information:

The case of Zimbabwe

By Ms Bridgeta Mudota



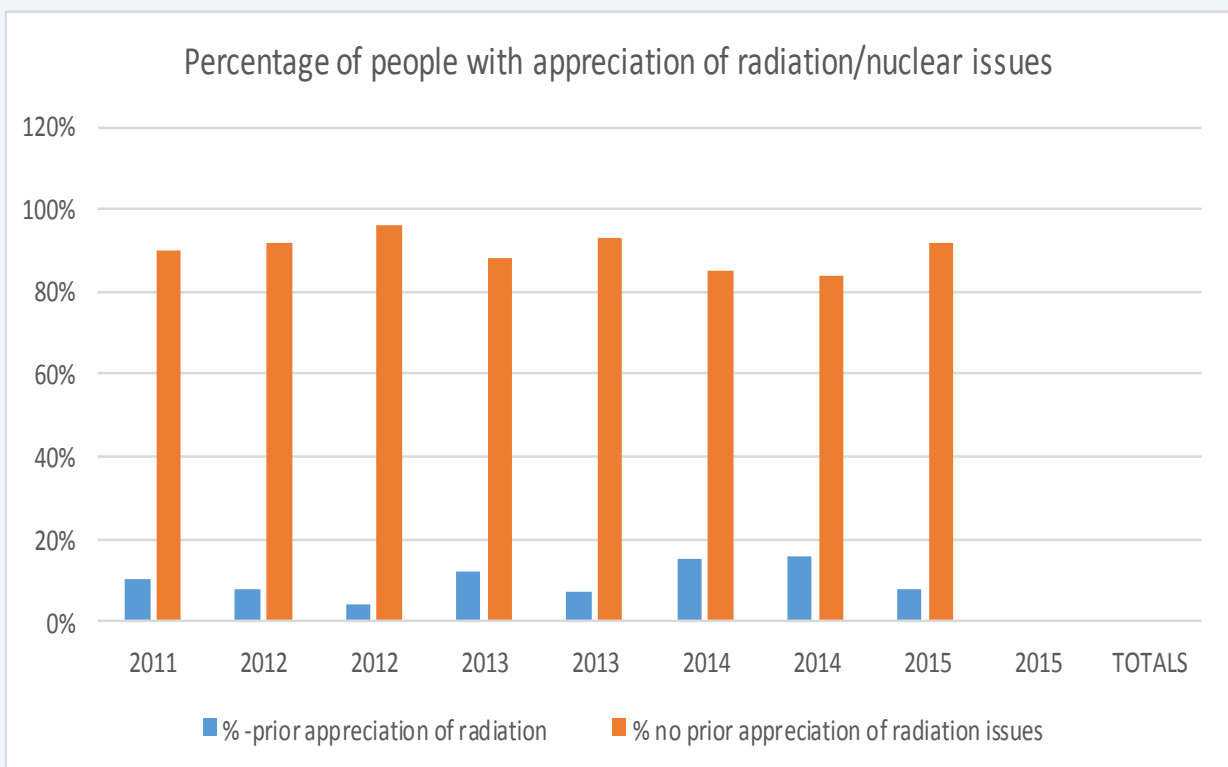
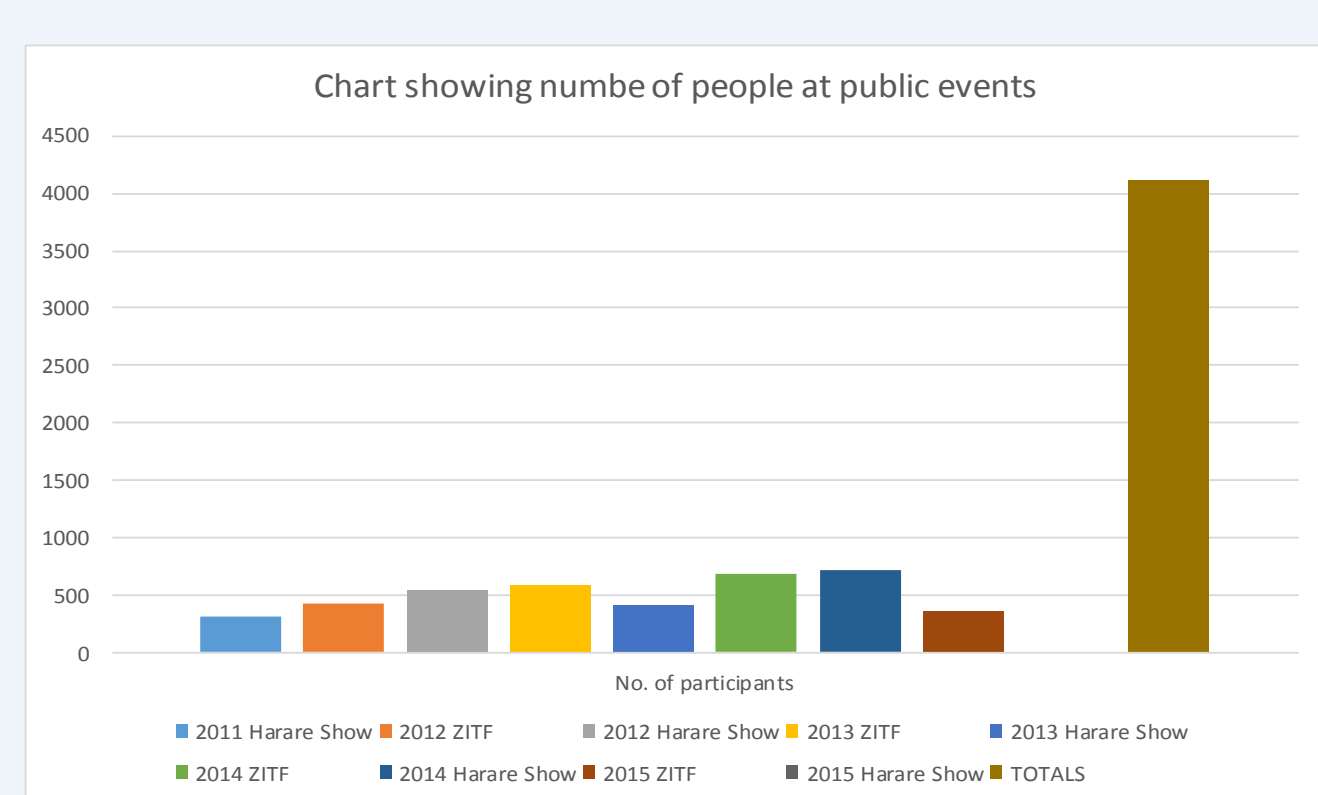
Radiation Protection Authority of Zimbabwe

Introduction

Communication is an important but generally misunderstood aspect of human life. Radiation and nuclear concepts are fairly new in Zimbabwe where a majority of the population is still ignorant about the meanings and applications of this new technology. During public exhibitions, seminars, conferences, workshops most of the participants exhibited ignorance of radiation/nuclear issues. Several challenges have been noted and the regulatory body is in the process of addressing public communication challenges and has managed to increase awareness from two percent in 2011 to five percent in 2015.

Methodology

The Communications Officer distributed questionnaires on knowledge of radiation/nuclear issues during various events hosted by the regulatory body and the results were as follows:



Communications Officer explaining radiation issues to the public.



Radiation Scientists and the Communications Officer join hands in radiation information dissemination to the public



The Head of the Zimbabwe Regulatory body, Mr Reward Severa also engages in public communication activities during seminars and conferences in an effort to reduce the impact of challenges in communicating radiation issues with the public.

Need for communicating radiation issues

- .Concept fairly new for the generality of the population in Zimbabwe-90%.
- .Existence of few local everyday examples of radiation in use.
- .Radiation now used for peaceful purposes in the medical, industrial, mining sectors for the benefit of populations
- .Remove the general fear among populations of the dangerous uses of nuclear/radiation materials
- .Population generally not interested in science issues as they feel it is a difficult field
- .Create awareness about the existence of the new regulatory body-RPAZ
- .To create media interest in the area so that information is further disseminated to the population

Challenges faced in communicating radiation issues ...

- .General lack of interest in the concept by the public therefore not receptive to communication
- .Use of channels of communication that may not be preferred by the public
- .Lack of local words/terms for the concept of radiation thereby making it more difficult for people to understand the concept
- .General ingrained belief by the population that nuclear/radiation issues only exist in developed countries



Various methods of public communication of radiation issues exist. In Zimbabwe brochures, posters, banners and websites are used as communication tools.



The public has in some cases exhibited lack of knowledge about what a radiation sign looks like. The Communications Officer shows a visitor what a trefoil looks like.

Overcoming challenges in communicating radiation issues ...

- .The government to include radiation issues in the school syllabus content from an early age
- .Development of child friendly literature for dissemination in schools
- .Development of public communication guides and literature in local languages
- .Training of communications personnel in regulatory authorities in radiation and nuclear issues
- .Use of varied methods of communications to create and improve awareness— road shows, radio programmes, television programmes, websites, brochures, posters, booklets, exhibitions, meetings, conferences and distributing leaflets at major public events

Conclusion:

Results from this study indicated that although the regulatory authority has faced some challenges in communicating nuclear/radiation issues, successes have been scored using current efforts thereby increasing public awareness from two percent in 2011 to five percent in 2015.

Recommendations:

Government of Zimbabwe

- .The government should introduce radiation education from an early age and include radiation in the school syllabi content
- .More students should be encouraged to develop interest in science related subjects and issues at school
- .Introduce degree programmes at universities in radiation issues
- .Conduct ongoing education programmes

Regulatory Authority

- .Conduct more outreach programmes into communities.
- .Media training in radiation to develop interest in reporting on radiation issues.
- .Decentralise operations to all provinces of the country to improve visibility to the population.
- .Publications should bear local images which the population can relate to.
- .Introduce some form of competition to encourage more coverage of nuclear/radiation stories by the press, best radiation reporter of the year etc .



Radiation is still a highly specialised male-dominated area



Exhibitions are among some of the tools used for public communication of radiation issues in Zimbabwe