

Many thanks for your input over the last 24 hours. Many of the participants' comments reflect the need for community input to determining the health and other development messages put out through the media. As discussed in my comments on formative research, this is critical, both at the stage of developing a radio intervention, and also during a radio program series, in order to make sure the program is designed not to violate community taboos, while, at the same time, broadening the audience's understanding of options for women, including their rights to education, equal roles in family decision making, and use of reproductive and other health care facilities.

As one participant mentioned, there are many forms of both electronic media and traditional media that can be employed simultaneously. This approach, named by Population Media Center as the "Whole Society Strategy," is the most effective approach. Certainly health communications should not be limited to radio, even when radio may be the dominant medium.

These comments relate directly to the key criteria for effective radio interventions for social change. I have mentioned several of these over the last three days. To be most effective at bringing about change, radio interventions should be based on extensive formative research. They should be written and produced by those who understand the culture and language. They should be filled with emotional conflict, and every episode should end with suspense, in order to bring the audience back for the next episode. They should use the three types of characters I mentioned yesterday (positive, negative and transitional). They should have multiple inter-weaving sub-plots. The settings should reflect the audience and their lifestyles. The programs should contain music and sound effects to set the mood and add audience interest. They should be carefully monitored and scientifically evaluated. Also, radio interventions should utilize multiple channels of communication at different times of day.

The transitional characters should evolve gradually and in response to problems they are facing in the storyline. Long-running serial dramas allow this. One-act dramas and public service announcements don't – and the result can be a negative reaction by the audience. Long-running programs are less likely to generate backlash.

There is much evidence about the cost-effectiveness of long-running programs – despite the added cost of writing, producing and broadcasting dozens or hundreds of episodes. The ultimate measure of cost-effectiveness is the cost per person who changed behavior in a positive direction. The serialized dramas PMC is using to improve people's lives are highly cost-effective because of the huge audiences they attract and the strong impact they have on the public. In Ethiopia, PMC's first long-running program cost just 4 U.S. cents to reach each listener. Cost per listener of a similar program in Tanzania was 3 cents per year. The annual cost per new adopter of family planning in Tanzania was 34 cents U.S., while the cost per person who reported that they changed behavior to avoid HIV infection was less than 10 cents.

In a mature media market, like Brazil or China, it may be difficult for an NGO to get its programs on the air. As a result, in such settings, it may be more effective to work with

producers of existing programs in order to help them incorporate social and health issues while still retaining the entertainment value of the program. This is the very successful strategy pursued by Vicki Beck in the United States, which she has shown so well during the past week. PMC has such a project in Brazil, using a strategy we refer to as “social merchandising.” Instead of lobbying the networks to cover our issue, we provide them with information on a range of social and health issues and help them build many such issues into the lives of the characters. This way, the resulting programs are not seen as focusing on one particular issue and our project staff are seen as being responsive to the network’s needs and not just pursuing their own agenda. The fact that all writing, acting, production and broadcast costs are covered by commercial advertising makes the effort very cost-effective. But we adhere to the principle that long-term treatment of an issue in a serialized drama is more likely to yield attitudinal and behavioral results than short-term interventions.

Best wishes,

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