

# Harnessing The Power of Long-Term Entertainment-Education (EE) to Improve Contraceptive Behavior Across Languages, Cultures, And Geographies in a Large African Country: The Democratic Republic of Congo

Presenter: Fatou Jah [fjah@populationmedia.org](mailto:fjah@populationmedia.org)  
Population Media Center (PMC)

## Background/Objectives

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has a very young population, with over half (52%) of its population under age 15. Currently, it is the third most populous country in Africa. Its population is projected to grow from its current 81.5 million to 216 million by 2050, to become the world's eighth most populous country. Congolese women generally have 6.3 children in their lifetime and maternal/child mortality is high, in part due to women's low use of modern contraception, stalled at 8% since 2007. To help address these unfavorable development indices, Population Media Center (PMC) developed and broadcast three successive 156-episodes radio serial dramas (RSDs) based on entertainment-education (EE) in DRC.

## Interventions

Radio was chosen as the medium of transmission for this communication project because it is by far the most economical and far-reaching mass media channel in the DRC. According to the 2013-14 Demographic and Health Survey, 43 percent of households own a radio. In the most vulnerable areas, men and women listen to radio more than any other form of media. Also, radio acts as a strong influencer and as a source where people go for reliable information. Thus, it is most effective to use radio drama to effectively engage a population diversified across urban and rural geographies, ethnicities, and income levels.

*Vivra Verra* (VV, "Time Will Tell"), the first of the three RSDs, was broadcast nationally in French on Radio Okapi from September 2014 to March 2016. To enhance coverage in a country as vast as DRC and to reinforce the issues addressed in VV, two other RSDs, *Elembo* ("Footprint" in the Lingala language) and *Pambazuko* in the Swahili language were launched from February 2015 to August 2016 and from April 2016 to October 2017, respectively. Each drama addressed family planning and issues related to family planning such as women's empowerment. In addition to family planning, each drama addressed four other themes as follows: VV: (1) domestic violence, (2) maternal health, (3) infant health, and (4) early sexuality; *Elembo* (1) adolescent health, (2) maternal health, (3) refugees, and (4) protection of forest and animal species; and *Pambazuko* (1) reproductive health (emergency obstetric planning and fistula), (2) rape in post-conflict areas, (3) youth education and children's immunization, and (4) conservation of nature and protection of endangered species.

Project implementation approach was similar for the three RSDs, and covered the following: (1) setting up of a Project office headed by a resident representative for the management and administration of the Project, (2) training of creative and production staff, (3) organization of, and regular meetings with a Steering Committee to guide and advise on the Project, (4) writing

of scripts and plotting of episodes, (5) production and monitoring of scripts in accordance with PMC methodology for mass media EE, (6) broadcast and promotion of the RSDs, and (7) monitoring and evaluation research, and (8) technical meetings to ensure that content of the dramas were properly aligned with the themes addressed.

## **Theory**

Behavior change theory (Social Learning Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Stages of Change) guides PMC's approach to EE. Framed around the stages of behavior change, PMC's methodology seeks to meet people where they are by: (1) Working on deep-seated, harmful norms and behaviors and catalyzing change with long-running entertainment where isolated service provision or direct messaging cannot. (2) Development of three role model character types – positive, negative, and transitional. And 3. Reaching large audiences. Promoted and delivered via popular broadcast mediums, PMC dramas reach large audiences and entire communities, cutting across socio-economic, gender, educational, and other cultural strata – catalyzing individual and communal change.

The remaining sections of the paper focuses on the evaluation research methodology and a discussion of the lessons learned and implications for the field.

## **Evaluation Methodology**

PMC uses summative/endline surveys to evaluate the effects of listening to it's RSDs by the target population on key programmatic indicators.

Each drama was evaluated at broadcast conclusion, adopting the same approach of a multi-stage cluster design, stratified by rural/urban residence. In each case a cross-sectional survey representative of the target population was conducted to collect information on their demographic characteristics, key programmatic indicators/outcomes, and their exposure to and perceptions of the RSDs.

The endline study for the French language RSD (*VV*) was conducted by the Centre de Communication et d'éducation pour la Santé (CESD), a Congolese independent research firm, in May 2016. The population-based representative sample consisted of 4000 reproductive-age women (15-49) and men (15-59) residing in four geographical regions of the country (East, West, North, and South). Fieldwork for the Eastern region was conducted in South Kivu province; Congo Central was used for the West; North-Ubangui for the North; and the Central Kasai for the South.

The endline study for the Lingala RSD (*Elembo*) was conducted in September-October of 2016 with a representative sample of 1920 reproductive aged women (15-49) and men (15-59) from the three broadcast regions in the DRC namely Equateur, Kinshasa, and Tshopo by an independent research firm named Forcier Consulting DRC. Finally, the endline study for the Kiswahili RSD (*Pambazuko*) was conducted with a total sample of 2545 reproductive-aged women (15-49) and men (15-59) between September and December 2017 by the same independent research firm, Forcier Consulting DRC.

Analyses of the three datasets were conducted by PMC's Research Unit. Changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors on key programmatic indicators due to exposure (i.e., audience size) to the particular drama were evaluated by comparing listeners (listened one or more times per week) and non-listeners of the drama series. Findings are presented as descriptive and as adjusted odds ratios generated from multivariate logistic regression comparisons to determine whether differences are statistically significant after controlling for potentially confounding demographic factors collected in the surveys.

## **Program Outcomes Results**

### **Descriptive:**

For the French RSD, 6% of the target population ever heard of (i.e., project/program reach) it translating into an estimate of 1,198,026 Congolese while 2% of the target population regularly listened to the RSD translating into an exposure of 358,564 Congolese women and men. Both audience size and exposure increased considerably with the two subsequent RSDs. Audience size was 22% and 30% for the Lingala and Kiswahili dramas, respectively while exposure was 15% and 16%, respectively.

### **Adjusted odds ratios:**

Due to its large and growing population, PMC had keen interest in launching a contraceptive behavior-change in program in the DRC, specifically addressing well-documented determinants of contraceptive use including positive changes in family planning knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, behaviors, and women's empowerment, in addition to other issues in the country.

In line with the above theoretical framework, and specifically the continuum of behavior change that begins with changes in knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, behavior, and norms. These in turn (together with women's empowerment) are all considered determinants of contraceptive behavior, we present the program outcomes in multivariate odds ratios under categories of (1) knowledge change, (2) attitudinal change, (3) self-efficacy change, (4) norms change, and (5) women's empowerment, as shown in Figures 1-6 below.

### **Discussion/Lessons Learned/Implications for the Field**

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Together, the evaluation findings on project reach and audience size between the first French language, second Lingala language, and third Kiswahili language RSDs illustrate several points:

- PMC's unique form of EE addresses deeply entrenched beliefs, addresses multiple issues simultaneously, reaches large audiences, and empowers people, and thus has the capacity to catalyze individual and societal change.
- The importance of dose effect of mass media EE programs for impact.
- The importance of long-term programming consisting of multiple projects for a sustained potential for positive contraceptive behavior and social change.
- Importantly, the results are irrespective of language, culture, and geographies/space.

- And replicating the program development and evaluation activities made possible comparisons and confidence in interpretations that would not have been possible otherwise.



