

P4.3. Strategy for Developing Religiously and Culturally Sensitive Behavior Change Communication (BCC) Materials in Northern Nigeria - Halima Ben Umar, Population Council, Abuja; Chris Ogedengbe, Population Council, Abuja; Andrew Karlyn; Population Council, Abuja
E-mail: humar@popcouncil.org; benumar2000@yahoo.com

Background/Significance: Early marriage is an important contributor to HIV exposure and other negative reproductive health outcomes for adolescent girls across sub-Saharan Africa, and northern Nigeria in particular. A large proportion of Nigerian girls are married during early adolescence, where the median age is 14.6 and 15.0 in the North-West and North-East geo-political zones of Nigeria respectively.

The HIV Prevention Project for Vulnerable Youth in Northern Nigeria, implemented by the Population Council, seeks to prevent new HIV infections via abstinence and marital fidelity through targeted prevention messages for pre-marital, married, divorced and widowed adolescent girls. The project also aims to raise awareness of early marriage and its sexual and reproductive health outcomes, as well as identify steps that can be taken to prevent the practice and mitigate its detrimental effects.

Intervention/Activity Tested: The case study tests the viability of rapid radio spot development workshops as a technique for creating religiously and culturally sensitive BCC materials within the social and political context of Northern Nigeria.

Methodology: The Population Council Nigeria organized and conducted a week-long participatory radio workshop that brought together various stakeholders interested in protecting young girls by delaying marriage and promoting school attendance. The workshop took place in Kano state, on July 16-20, 2007 and was attended by 38 participants. Participants comprised all segments of the community, including religious and community leaders, politicians, parents, husbands, grandmothers, young unmarried girls, married and post-marriage young women, and representatives of NGOs.

With the guidance of three facilitators, including Population Council staff, participants defined, developed, produced, and pre-tested a series of 9 radio spots all within the week-long workshop. The spots were then aired and reinforced with a series of popular radio call-in shows. The entire process from message development, to production, to airing and feedback lasted less than two months.

This rapid media development model allowed stakeholders to develop the messages based on highly segmented group interactions, and then produce radio spots on-site. This enabled each group to evaluate their own messages as they would be heard on the radio, as well as give other stakeholder groups in the workshop an opportunity to critique the messages and spots of others. During a third pre-test stage, the spots were shared with and critiqued by community members external to the workshop. By the end of the workshop, Population Council had facilitated the creation of a dynamic community-supported and constituent-engaged media campaign on a highly controversial subject.

Findings: Based on post-workshop evaluations and community responses, the project's design successfully served a dual advocacy purpose: it increased the skills and knowledge of workshop participants, and simultaneously produced religiously and culturally sensitive BCC material.

The workshop succeeded in getting various stakeholder groups who normally have little opportunity for constructive interaction, such as divorced mothers and religious leaders, to work together to shape effective BCC material.

Initial feedback from workshop participants and radio call-in shows suggests that this is a considerably more participatory—and potentially more effective—approach than consultant-generated spots, or even spots that are pre-tested on target group members. Based on post-workshop evaluations, participants perceived the project to be empowering and unique in design and effect.

Lessons Learned: Rapid radio-spot development workshops offer a promising methodology for creating religiously and culturally sensitive behavior change communication materials in Northern Nigeria. These radio spots, when used in conjunction with radio call-in programs, can effectively generate public and community dialogue on the sensitive issue of delaying marriage and keeping girl children in school.